

*More
Ballads
of Field
& Billet
&
Other Verses*

*By
W. Kersley
Holmes*



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MORE BALLADS
OF FIELD AND
BILLET
AND
OTHER VERSES

BALLADS OF FIELD AND BILLET

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

"We find their simplicity and sincerity very refreshing—as refreshing as 'cold water the day after'—as a change from the superheated, pumped-up patriotism of the average war poet. . . . Workmanlike verse that scores a psychological bull's-eye in every other stanza, and never gets off the target in the rest. Finally let it be said that Mr. Holmes can make a picture with the best of the art-poets. . . . Mr. Holmes deserves all the encouragement that comes his way, for there is more of the high, humorous spirit of our New Army (which is child and heir of the old one) in his verse than in all the work of the professional practitioners."

—*Morning Post*.

"Mr. Holmes is a poet of distinction."—*Glasgow News*.

"He concentrates on types and experiences, and as he is himself serving, his clever lines have an intimate note that makes them ring true. . . . His sketches of life at the training camps are illuminated by sparkling wit and undaunted optimism."—*Edinburgh Evening News*.

"They range from the grave to the humorous, from the realistic to the romantic, but something of the brightness of youth is in them all, something of that gallant gaiety which makes a jest of the discomforts of life, yet never thinks of life itself as a jest. . . . Probably the most striking feature of the book is that it will give as much joy to the civilian as to the enlisted. We have tried a score of the pieces with success on the former, and we should fancy it a godsend in the trenches."—*Glasgow Herald*.

"Of the numerous books of verse called forth by the present war, whether they be anthological compilations or original compositions, I venture to think that not one will ultimately prove so popular (thanks to its clever artistic skill, its natural and melodious ease, its graphic delineations of scene and character, and its prevailing cheeriness of outlook) as *Ballads of Field and Billet*. . . . Corporal W. Kersley Holmes has done his country a lasting service by the production of these ballads."—J. L. R. in *The Weekly Scotsman*.

"Emphatically the most delectable collection of verse the war has occasioned so far. . . . I regret that I have no space to quote more. The whole book is so enjoyable that it is better you should buy it and read it all for yourself."—A. St. John Adcock in *Everyman*.

MORE BALLADS OF FIELD AND BILLET

AND OTHER VERSES

BY

W. KERSLEY HOLMES

AUTHOR OF

"BALLADS OF FIELD AND BILLET"



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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

I AM indebted to the respective proprietors of the *Glasgow Herald*, the *Glasgow News*, and, in one instance, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, for kind permission to republish the verses of which this little volume is composed. The pieces making up the latter portion of the book, of course, appeared originally previous to August, 1914.

W. K. H.

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SOMEWHERE IN FRANCE.

WHATEVER in the coming days our work, our luck,
may be,
Our hope deferred is realised—we've crossed the narrow
sea ;
For long we suffered sympathy, kind question, hostile
scoff,
Preparing, waiting, praying for the order to be off,
And now, come weal or woe, we're here, at last we've
got our chance—
We're with the friends we've envied and we're some-
where out in France !

We used to long to wander, in the distant days of
peace,
But custom kept us captive, hardly dreaming of release ;
We lived in soft security, despising humdrum days
That followed one another with the same stale, irksome
ways ;
We may not meet adventure here, we look for no
romance,
But anyhow we're riding down the muddy roads of
France.

Long, long ago the English hosts, in sunshine and in
rain,
Came tramping where their stubborn sons now march
to war again,

Their bowmen and their halberdiers, in mud and mist
 and snow,
 Went swinging stoutly forward as our khaki columns
 go ;
 The poplars watched the knights ride by with sword
 and mace and lance,
 As they watch us through the sleet-storm in these
 leafless woods of France.

The last of autumn's apples rot beneath the shivering
 trees ;
 In huddled, miry villages the duckponds flood or freeze ;
 Our fingers, in the norther's nip, scarce feel the reins
 they hold,
 Our feet that press the stirrup are benumbed with
 bitter cold ;
 Against all hardships still we set one saving circum-
 stance—
 The miry ways we ride by are at last the roads of
 France !



MORE BALLADS OF FIELD AND BILLET.



LETTERS FROM CAMP.

FORGIVE us, if we always write
Of what we daily do,
As if whatever we indite
Can serve to interest you.

The old, worn problems still remain
We argued so about,
But other matters, few and plain,
Have somehow washed them out.

Books, music, pictures, and the play,
And even sport itself
Seem secondary things to-day—
Fine toys laid on the shelf.

And any muse that still would thrive
Must do as mortals do,
And prove her title to survive
By wearing khaki too.

So, if the soldier's daily round
Makes all our news the same,
Remember we are men who've found
At last a single aim!

THE SOLDIER MOOD.

WE were eating chip potatoes underneath the April
stars
That glittered coldly and aloof from earth and earthly
wars;
We were three good pals together, and the day's hard
work was done,
So we munched our chip potatoes, half for food and
half for fun.

Half the world was war's dominion, but the mutter
of the strife
Had come to seem accustomed as the undertone of
life;
We were fit and hard and happy, and the future was
unknown,
The past—all put behind us; but the present was
our own.

We were doing our plainest duty, meant to end what
we'd begun;
Why worry for to-morrow till to-day's big job was
done?
So we walked and laughed together like three modern
musketeers—
Defying indigestion and the Germans and the years.

We were eating chip potatoes with our fingers, like
a tramp,

And the unseen owls were hooting in the trees around
the camp;

We were happy to be hungry, glad to be alive and
strong;

So—to-morrow might be terror, but to-night could be
a song!



BEFORE REVEILLE.

THE camp still sleeps, save for the guard alone,
Though morning's gauzy mist fast clears away,
And o'er its slumber shines the broad, bright day,
While swift the sun ascends his lofty throne.
Heavenward long since the choir of larks has flown,
And now the blue air thrills with its lay
As if nowhere the sun and song of May
Were marred by war's rough trumpet fiercely blown.

Upon the turf the cool dew glitters yet;
A distant seabird wails; the quiet sea
Murmurs in peace as if it would forget
Its might, its menace, and its tragedy.
But now the spell is broken: shrill and gay,
Cry out the bugles for the working day.



AURORA.

DEAR, you are like the dawn, because you bear
A growing radiance, a still, steadfast light,
Won from past sorrow, even as from the night
Day's earliest hours bring beauty past compare.
These morns of spring awake with song—the air,
Pure, fresh, and cool, more luminous than bright,
Thrills with quick music from the bare trees' height,
And where you are seems music to be there.
Who breathes the dawn finds faith in life increased
And inspiration for the weariest day;
The earth revived is worshipping the east,
Where dawn steps softly on her tranquil way.

Ah, radiance, song, and hope, that life renew,
Fill the new song with memories of you.



A REGIMENTAL CHARACTER.

THE climates of the earth have left their signs
 Upon his bull-dog face, where deep-cut lines
 Lend an expression grim and worldly-wise,
 Believing neither you nor yet his eyes.
 His shoulders broad still speak of years of drill—
 He stands or lounges like a gunner still,
 Although the chest he used to carry so
 Has slowly slipped, with time, a foot too low.
 Wherever Britain's bugle-calls are blown
 He's found strange wisdom, making scraps his own.
 Above the common clash of pot and pan,
 You'll hear his cuss-words, learned in Hindustan;
 The camp canteen will hush at times to hear
 His army Urdu criticise the beer.
 There, as he sips, he leans across the bar,
 And swops the barman yarns of many a war,
 Or else descants with broad, deep, Yorkshire tongue—
 Of drill and discipline when he was young—
 While half our rumours, when they're brought to
 book,
 Are found to emanate from him—the Cook.



ROBIN-A-TIPTOE.

ROBIN-A-TIPTOE is sixteen hand,
And carries his head and his tail in air;
He seems to step to a silver band
That he alone listens to everywhere.

Robin-a-Tiptoe is chestnut bright,
With a dainty blaze on his silken nose;
On every leg is a stocking white
That flickers in time as he lightly goes.

Robin-a-Tiptoe's rippling mane—
Flames in the wind when he gallops out,
Yet the smallest touch on the tightened rein
Will check him or stop him or turn him about.

Robin-a-Tiptoe's eyes are bright,
And his nostrils quiver with pride to live;
His speed and strength are his heart's delight,
And the willing gifts that he loves to give.

Robin-a-Tiptoe, the Colonel's steed,
He'll gallop the wind, and win, unspurred;
He'll gallop as straight to the death, at need,
At the call of a touch and a whispered word!

FORETHOUGHT.

SOMETIMES when drill is over
 We sit and rest awhile,
 And with small talk of trifles
 The leisure hour beguile;
 And that is when there comes to mind
 The thought of togs we left behind.

For some of us were dandies,
 Who now inhabit huts,
 In regulation khaki
 Transformed to harder nuts,
 And there are moments when we sigh
 To think of civil suits put by.

Swift change design and fashion,
 Though peace should dawn to-day
 We could not sport by daylight
 The clothes we packed away;
 Worn khaki well becomes a king,
 But mufti's quite another thing.

Oh, patriotic tailors,
 Tyrannic in your power,
 Have pity on your patrons
 When peace blooms into flower,
 And rule that well-dressed men be guised
 As we were when we mobilised!

SERGEANT SANDY.

RECRUITS first think him resolutely grim,
Obeying orders just for fear of him,
Yet if they do their work they find anon
A twinkle there, and learn it means "Well done!"
But woe indeed to him who tries to slack
And finds the Sergeant, wrathful, on his track!
At stables, when these chilly mornings break,
We, yawning, find him far too wideawake.
Though seldom on parade he needs to swear
(As others often), yet few Troopers care
To catch a certain glint in Sandy's eye
That means, "You'll find I saw you, by-and-bye";
Yet none so quick to lend a helping hand
To duffers trying, or to understand
The queer predicaments whereinto we
With hapless horses, blunder constantly.
At "Smokers" every man feels something wrong
Unless we've Sandy in his favourite song;
Then you will hear us such a chorus raise
(A mob half-hid in blue tobacco haze)
As will re-echo often in your ears
In wiser, sadder, reminiscent years.

.

Know Sergeant Sandy, and you love him too,
And do, for pleasure, what he orders you.

THE CAMP PIANO.

IDLE and mute, it mostly stands,
 Mere lumber, hour by hour;
 A treasure casket locked by spells
 That waits the word of power.

Sometimes a passing soldier strikes,
 With heavy hand, the keys,
 That cry in harshest discords, or
 Haphazard harmonies.

But now and then there enters one
 In simple khaki dressed,
 With buttons bright, and weathered cheeks—
 A soldier like the rest—

Who at the waiting instrument
 His seat serenely takes,
 And, to his fingers, into song
 Released its soul awakes!

He knows the passes that unlock
 The magic treasure-chest;
 And we who listen find it held
 The songs we love the best!

A SPRING SONG.

Now you who live in houses
In desperation fling
Yourselves, your maids, and spouses
With futile questioning
Upon one task—you go about
To turn your dwellings inside out
Because it is the spring.

Each carpet, chair, and table
You drag to open air,
Existing as you're able,
With chaos everywhere;
You toil, dishevelled and a-dust,
As householders at present must,
When gentle spring draws near.

But we, attired in khaki,
Have wiser ways:—Instead
At morning, live and larky,
Each moves his three-plank bed,
And sweeps aside what trifles may
Accumulate from day to day,
Where simple lives are led.

The birds sing in the larches
(And various other trees);
The music that is March's
We relish at our ease;
The spring's your yearly bother, but
Were you content to hire a hut
You'd live in ecstasies.

A WEST WIND AT SUNSET.

Out of the shining west from the wide bay
Of clear pale heaven, where the April sun,
Undimmed by any mist, sinks fast away,
Keen, cold, and swift the wind's wild torrents run.

The trees, still waiting to unfurl their green,
Catch on vexed branches the last level ray,
And toss long broken shadows east; far seen
Smooth heights like billows heave their green and
grey.

Lower and lower flames the day's great light,
Eastward the evening gathers mistily;
Day drops behind us; towards the windy night
Earth sweeps us on as to an unknown sea.

Like helpless castaways, we seem to drift
Into the darkness: yet our spirits are
Bold venturers, who know a coast will lift;
We sail to make To-morrow—Hope our star!



THE LAST RESORT.

LAST night we lounged upon the turf
To take our simple tea;
Above us arched a genial sky,
Before us smiled the sea.

To-day, from out the bitter east,
Drive forth the wind and rain,
Which slacken only, if at all,
To gather spite again.

Our canvas dwellings, dim within,
Are sodden, soaked, and cold;
The shivering horses stand and drip—
Most doleful to behold!

The turf is sopping underfoot,
The sands are dark with wet;
While overhead the weeping clouds
Droop low and lower yet.

What comfort can the soldier find?
Long ere the day is sped
We stretch our palliasses out,
And snugly—go to bed!

THE WATER WAGGON.

Two labouring horses pull it,
A wet and weighty load,
With many a jar and falter,
Along the bleaching road.

Its colour brings refreshment
To sun-dried eyes that ache;
Deep green like river rushes—
Though all the camp may bake.

It jolts and drops and splashes
Behind the straining pair—
The welcomest of waggons,
The one we least could spare.

The sky is hot and glaring,
The breeze is hard and dry,
The dust from trampling horse hoofs
Floats choking tree-top high;

Amidst the drouth and labour,
This moving cistern stands—
A waggon-load of treasure
Delivered to our hands!

FALLEN.

WE talked together in the days gone by
Of life and of adventure still to come,
We saw a crowded future, you and I,
And at its close two travellers come home,
Full of experience, wise, content to rest,
Having faced life and put it to the test.

Already we had seen blue skies grow bleak,
And learned the fickleness of fate, firsthand;
We knew each goal meant some new goal to seek,
Accepting facts we couldn't understand;
You seemed equipped for life's most venturous way—
Death closed the gallant morning of your day.

Oh, many a one still watching others go
Might fall, and leave no such heart-sickening gap,
What waste, what pity seems to squander so
Courage that dared whatever ill might hap,
While laggards, fearful both of worst and best,
Hoard up the life you hazarded with zest!

It seems like waste to others, but to you
And the thronged heroes who have paid the price,
Yourselves, your hopes, and all you dreamed and knew
Were counted as a puny sacrifice—
You knew, with keener judgment, all was gained,
If honour at the last shone still unstained!

A FAT LITTLE SOLDIER.

YOUR spirit within may be bold as the best,
 Your heart may be fierce as a flame,
 With patriot passion your person possessed,
 And ardour no peril can tame,
 But no one who sees you will think of all that—
 They only remark, "Oh, how jolly and fat!"

What's the use of grouching to people at home
 Of the rations—perpetual stew,
 Lank roasts that disable your cutlery so,
 Bread and jam—they won't listen to you.
 They will say, "There's not much HE should
 grumble about!
 It's pretty privation makes privates so stout!"

You can't have the pleasure of bragging with pride
 Of the strenuous toil of your days,
 Of the leagues you go legging with chums by your
 side,
 Or trenching in arduous ways;
 The best you can do is your hardships to lump,
 And smilingly suffer the fate of the plump!

When your day comes at last to embark for the fight,
 A path to distinction to carve,
 The Huns will despair as you roll into sight—
 The Briton whom nothing can starve!
 Oh! bravely and buoyantly bounce to Berlin—
 But give up the thought that you'll ever be thin!

FATIGUES.

THINGS green and crisp and cool—

Fresh salad and ice-cream,

The limpid river-pool—

These are our waking dream,

While in the glare and drouth and dust

We do fatigues as soldiers must.

The sand is in our throats,

Our ripening noses peel;

Imagination gloats

(Howe'er the flesh may feel)

On piles of fruit begemmed with dew,

Green glades where moonlight filters through.

Cold tarts and mayonnaise,

Icebergs and flavoured floes,

Plunge baths and sparkling sprays,

The flash of garden hose;

The cool green shade of whispering trees—

Mirages show us things like these.

With shirts to elbows rolled,

And clothing almost nil,

We try to think how cold

We felt last winter, till

There seems no bliss that man may know

Like wielding shovels in wet snow!

WAITING.

WE have offered ourselves with the best, we have
 grudged neither profit nor ease,
 Nor have shrunk from beholding the shadow that
 falls as the Chooser decrees;
 We have disciplined body and mind that we might
 the more manfully live,
 And thrilled with the manlier life which we strove
 to be worthy to give.

Yet we wait as the weeks and the months hurry on,
 while in thousands They go
 With the ardour we share, who are brothers, to pay
 the great debt we all owe;
 Is the honour of Britain but theirs? The pledge that
 we gave is the same—
 For that honour to stand or to fall. Who denies us
 the birthright we claim?

“They have suffered,” you tell us, “in hunger and
 thirst, to the death that they brave;
 Can you claim to be peers, who are sheltered secure
 by the sentinelled wave?”
 But we answer, who chafe in the leash, “We are all
 but as one, we and they,
 Who have come to their kingdom through pain; for,
 like them, come what will, we obey!”

MY CHUM.

(AFTER UHLAND.)

I HAD a faithful comrade,
Well trusted and well tried—
A friend for stormy weather;
We joined the ranks together
And roughed it side by side.

There came a shell that found us—
God!——is it I or you?
Unscathed, I saw him lying
Before me, torn and dying—
My chum, my comrade true.

The hand I stretched towards him
He tried to clasp, in vain;
“Can’t shake;—it’s not for ever;
The other side the River
We’ll be good chums again!”



A MID-DAY HALT.

ALL morning we had ridden in the heat,
Amidst the dust that floated from the beat
Of trotting horse-hoofs on the sun-baked road;
Our skins, our clothes, the saddles we bestrode
Were hot as if to burning, and the eye
Ached from the glare of parching earth and sky.
At noon we walked our horses round a turn,
Where the bleached highway dipped to cross a burn,
And found a little valley hidden there—
A cup of green and gold, brimmed with blue air.
Here we drew rein, dismounting by the stream
That cooled already with its limpid gleam,
And led our horses to the dusty brink,
Eased of their bits, with slackened girths, to drink.
How eagerly they pressed to quench their thirst!
(How enviously we watched them drinking first!)
Some drank with dainty lips; some in their turn
Sucked noisy mouthfuls from the troubled burn;
Some raised their dripping muzzles, then again
Drank as if endless rivers they would drain.
Each hot and eager creature satisfied,
We led them from the water, and untied
The bag of oats on every saddle borne,
And soon the cheerful sound of crunching corn
Told every horse was happy; then at last
The troopers took their soldierly repast,
Lounging at ease upon luxuriant green,
With eyes at leisure for the radiant scene.

It was a dell where legend's favourite knight
Would seek refreshment after stubborn fight;
Or where the shepherd maiden and her swain
Might live their golden pastoral again,
Or Queen Titania and King Oberon
Hold court and revel, all their feud foregone.
Nowhere is greener grass than that which grew
Within this precinct arched with airy blue;
Rich hawthorn bushes with their creamy show
Heightened the splendour of the fiery glow
Of crowded thickets of the whin and broom
That clothed the valley's sides with fragrant bloom,
Whereon the sunlight shone and throbbed as though
The sun's own glory flowered on earth below.



HORSE-BATHING PARADE.

A FEW clouds float across the grand blue sky,
The glorious sun has mounted zenith-high,
Mile upon mile of sand, flat, golden, clean,
And bright, stretch north and south, and fringed with
green,
The rough dunes fitly close the landward view.
All else is sea; somewhere in misty blue
The distant coast seems melting into air—
Earth, sky, and ocean, all commingling there—
And one bold, lonely rock, whose guardian light
Glistens afar by day, a spire snow white.
Here, where the ceaseless blue-green rollers dash
Their symmetry to dazzling foam and flash,
We ride our horses, silken flanks ashine,
Spattered and soaked with flying drops of brine,
The sunny water tosses round their knees,
Their smooth tails shimmer in the singing breeze.
White streaks of foam sway round us, to and fro,
With shadows swaying on the sand below;
The horses snort and start to see the foam,
And hear the breaking roar of waves that come,
Or, pawing, splash the brine, and so we stand,
And hear the surf rush hissing up the sand.



THE WHISTLING SOLDIER.

WHEN the larks and the sunshine have opened the
show,

And the bugles have given the cue that we know,
When it's time for us all to be up and about,
With shrill variations he whistles us out.

He whistles as clear as the confident thrush,
As he strides out to stables with rubber and brush;
We can't be downhearted while, careless and gay,
He tries his old tunes on the dullest new day.

When a night parade's over, and homeward to camp,
Released from long vigil and silence, we tramp,
Like a flute we must join once we hear it begin,
With a medley of marches he whistles us in.

When the stars are alight in the darkening blue,
And our candles still burn (for a minute or two!),
From his pillow he whistles a soft, plaintive air,
That noisiest neighbours keep silence to hear.

A march or a rag-time, an opera's flight,
He whistles them all, and he whistles them right;
He whistles for fun, like a bird on a tree—
A light-hearted lintie just thirteen stone three!

THE NEUTRAL.

A HAZE of dust floats up from marching feet
Along our homely roads;
Great waggons clatter down the sleepy street
With unfamiliar loads.

The little town, so quiet as it stirred
In languorous morning haze,
By ringing bugles, lately still unheard,
Now regulates its days.

In quiet meadows towns of tents arise,
Where peace was wont to brood;
The mutterings of world-wide war surprise
The heart of solitude.

War, like a restless fever, haunts the air,
Changing the world we knew;
The men we are forget the men we were
In all we think and do.

And yet, impartial, patient, as of yore,
Life wakes the hidden seed;
Of who will reap or who will reap no more
Wise nature takes no heed.



THE DAILY ORDEAL.

WE shrink from no mere hardship. For a year
(Or very nearly) we've been proud to bear
All kinds of weather for our country's sake—
We've only smiled to freeze, or soak, or bake,
While as for danger—it's our only wrong
That we are kept at home, and safe, so long.
Yet there's one feature of our daily toil
From which the bravest of our braves recoil.
As heroes they in battle would behave,
Yet how they yearn to shirk the daily shave!
Our burning cheeks are skinned by sun and breeze—
With what harsh pangs do whiskers part from these!
How shrinks the strictest stoic to begin
To rend reluctant stubble from his chin;
Each dawn renews what yesterday he feared,
The call to martyr's anguish for his beard;
Each night he settles down, distraught, to know
That while he sleeps the ruthless bristles grow.
Why must this be? What valour do we gain
By this recurrent, self-inflicted pain?
Though we allowed the natural growth to spread,
Would it not serve as "cover" for our head?
Why must we pass this daily ordeal through
If whiskered Britons won at Waterloo?



“MISSING.”

If this one word is all we ever hear
 To close your story, like a half-writ book,
 Telling of one whom but to know made dear
 In every act, in every word and look.

How shall we bear the future and the pain,
 The ceaseless torture of the thoughts that sting,
 Waking incessantly to ask in vain
 For tidings certain—whatsoe’er they bring?

How shall we stifle thought’s activity
 That pictures suffering in a thousand ways?
 Must even hope persuade us you are free
 By that sad door through which not love can gaze?

Oh! to despair were honour small to you.
 If you still live, a captive or in pain,
 We know you are, in all you think and do,
 The man we pray God give us back again.

If you still live!—hope lifts her fainting head;
 But if, O well beloved, in pain you died,
 We know that homeward your strong soul has sped,
 The same true gold we knew, but purified!

A SOLDIER'S PARADISE.

I LAY me down to slumber, and recall Mahomet's
words,
So strange of sound, that Paradise is 'neath the shade
of swords;
Not under leafy awnings high, serene in scented
glades,
But roofed or menaced, barred or screened by glitter-
ing battle-blades.

What meant he by his sounding text? The mystic
reads it clear,
A challenge to a hero-soul, well pleasing to his ear;
A warrior prophet's paradox: peace is the fruit of
strife,
And only labour merits rest, and death alone wins
life!

How came that image to his mind? As on his wars he
went,
Perchance the prophet, musing, marked, within his
goatskin tent,
How, while fixed purpose filled his soul with peace
above dismay,
The shadow of his scimitar crept o'er him as he lay.

And we each night win dreamless rest, though strait
and 'hard our beds,
With sword and rifle in array above our weary heads;
One strong, set purpose masters care. True are the
prophet's words—
We, too, have found a paradise beneath the shade of
swords!



NOON.

Not many hours ago the zenith blue
Still showed a score of stars, though faint and pale,
Along the east there lay a misty veil,
Where a dim, rayless, low-hung orb peered through.
The chilly air was still, till morning drew
A long, light waking breath; on hill and dale
Brooded a dim enchantment soon to fail.
The tender grass still bore the freshened dew.

But now that once dim orb is throned on high,
Ascended like a tyrant into power;
The parching earth, beneath a flaming sky,
Seems like a slave before his lord to cower.

Yet here and there shrunk pools of shade remain,
And evening's tranquil tide will flow again.



THE FORERUNNERS.

WHERE the Vikings in Valhalla shout their songs of
 ringing words,
And the music to the revel is the clatter of the swords,
Where they sing of bygone battle in a roar of heroes'
 mirth,
Do they turn their wild eyes yearning to their well-
 belovèd earth?

To the luring leagues of ocean where with seeking sail
 they ranged,
As they knew him, grey enchanter, ever changing,
 never changed,
When the dragon-ships went questing till far conquest
 closed with death,
Where the swinging wave still whitens to their war
 winds' mighty breath?

Do they pause amid the revel while the mead bowl
 waits to flow,
As a rumour thrills Valhalla of the war that spreads
 below?
Widest war by land and ocean, bloodier battle than
 they knew,
When the spirit of the slayer followed hard the foe
 he slew?

If they still behold earth's battles far across death's
dim abyss.

What a flame of pride and triumph leaps to crown
their warrior bliss!

How they glory in Valhalla as they mark by field and
flood

Grimmest death defied with laughter by the children
of their blood!



TO MY SUCCESSOR.

(Women are in many instances taking the place of clerks who have joined the Forces.)

So, on that very seat, whereon I spent
 Full many an hour in weariness, you sit;
 At that same ledger over which I bent
 You do, with added grace, your little bit;
 You use my inkpot, possibly the pen
 That seemed so hopelessly prosaic then.

In idle moments doubtless you explore
 That desk's recesses, finding therein hid
 The relics of an epoch, (mine), that's o'er,
 As one who excavates a pyramid.
 If any thought of me your fancy deigns,
 Treat gently, as becomes you, my remains!

Think how the man who left that litter there—
 Torn papers, postcards, sandwiches perchance—
 Went at a word, with not an hour to spare,
 And not a thought but "How's the wind for
 France?"
 If you "clear out" and "tidy up" (you must),
 Yet let one tender sigh disturb the dust.

And bear in mind that one you never knew
Thinks sometimes of you, in a dreaming hour,
Amidst strange scenes, and likes to picture you
Transforming his old office like a flower;
Smiling to put the dullest entries through,
And adding charm to what he used to do.

He does not grudge your triumph, nor dispute
Your swift succession to his three-legged throne;
You've found your rôle, the Army a recruit,
And both of us have come into our own.
One certain fact emerges in the case—
You're jolly welcome to your present place!



OTHER VERSES : WEEK-ENDS AND WORK-DAYS.



THE STREET PIANO.

DEEP in the dewy wood, the poet-haunted,
Pours forth her passionate song the nightingale,
A sunward song that soars and soars undaunted,
The lark's shrill ecstasy delights the vale.

But in our smoky sky no lark is soaring,
Amidst our chimneys chants no Philomel,
Only with brazen voice the streets are roaring
The sordid saga that we know too well.

Therefore to thee this humble praise I offer,
Piano-errant, clamouring to the crowd!
Oh! deafen with thy joy the nice-eared scoffer,
Whirl forth thy plangent pæan yet more loud!

Not thine, bold troubadour, the arts adorning
Thy subtler sister of the drawing-room,
But ah! thy fearless merriment at morning,
Thy ringing lilt that lights the evening's gloom!

Yours is a voice that sings to scatter pleasure,
Bewitch with glee the ragged urchins' feet,
Set jostling pavements marching to thy measure,
And thrill with carnival the swarming street.

Barrow beloved! Field-battery of fancies,
Swift be thy wheels when skies are grey and glum!
Pelt the proud terrace with delirious dances,
And with resistless lyrics rake the slum!



THE WILD DUCK.

THE windy sky is red above the sun
That sets unseen behind one great grey hill,
Within whose shade already day is done;
While all the western snow, the evening still
Illuminates with floods of rosy light,
Warm and serene above the cheerless cold
That shrouds the glen's steep shoulders, fold on
fold,
By which the path winds east, towards the night.

A slender crescent floats the ghostly moon,
With scarce a starry escort in the sky,
Beneath whose waxing light the hilltops soon
Will shine with more than day's white majesty.
A little loch lies clasped amongst the braes,
Now, half grey ice; half, where the winds can blow,
Astir with waves, steel-blue against the snow,
As through the open glen the norther plays.

No sound is here except the norther's song
To whom these freezing solitudes belong;
But from the lochside, startled to the wing,
There go the wild duck, clamorous, in a string,
Scaring the echoes of the desolate night,
Till in the further gloaming ends their flight.

TO A CITY EGG.

I CANNOT blame you, Egg, that you protest—
Boiled and beheaded, you might have flown
Had they but left you one more week alone;
You leave the larger life no more than guessed!
I think you were ambitious in the nest—
The sphere of politics you felt your own:
Let now my nose's martyrdom atone
If my mere meal caused that career's arrest!

A certain distance marks our courtesy:
I do respect you, but we can't be friends.
So will you leave the table, or shall I?—
I'll write your epitaph to make amends:
Something pathetic—take your choice, I beg—
“*So young a chicken!*” or “*So old an Egg!*”



A FEBRUARY DAY.

ALL morning blew the wind and rain,
Now soft, now blustering loud again;
All morning drooped across the sky
The weeping, sombre canopy
Of folding clouds, that ever pressed
Unbroken, sunless, from the west.
And drifting, trailing, as they blew,
Veiled all the upper hills from view,
Or by some gust were rent to show
High clefts still white with sheltered snow;
The good, grey rain came whispering down
On endless, new-ploughed acres brown:
Till burns, in summer lost to sight,
Rushed on cascading, loud and white;
And wayside trickles overflowed
And swept their course across the road.
By noon the clouds began to lift,
With here and there a flying rift;
Until the hills, from howe to height,
Rose clear and soaring to the sight.
And, as the rain began to cease,
The wind's quick moods inclined to peace;
Then in the west, a space of sky
Blown clear of cloud, spread wide and high—
A luminous abyss of green,
A shining lake of light serene:

Amidst grey, cloudy cliffs and capes
That ever changed their shattered shapes—
A peaceful sea, whose boundaries spread
Until its coast was overhead;
And, ere the quiet night was near,
From west to east the sky was clear.



THE DOUBLE BASS.

Now hear the cumbrous monster,
Goliath of his kind,
Express in grumbling measure
His slow but cheerful mind:
He growls alone
In undertone,
But with what power behind!

The carolling piano
Encourages his song—
A hoarse old Meistersinger
The Mädchens gay among—
And up and o'er
Their trebles soar
To help old Hans along.

Anon the spirit, summoned
By hand and bow, becomes
A burly Burgomeister
Who in his cellar hums:
A veteran bluff,
Whose voice is rough
And deep as distant drums.

The melody enhances,
Though stately still and grim,
And stiffly steps and dances—
A jovial giant's whim;
While stark and strong,
In rumbling song,
Our Ogre, hark to him!

THE PEOPLE UPSTAIRS.

I do not know your hobby, Jones; I do not wish to
know,

Though you command the second flat, that I reside
below;

I welcome your arrival, and your kindling hearth I
bless,

While in all friendly charity I guess my little guess.

When first we met upon the stairs, I thought to find
my neighbour

A man of stature, bone, and *thew*, designed to toss the
caber,

But gentle and dyspeptic was the manner that you
wore—

How *could* you lift the wardrobe up and bump it on
the floor?

I've watched the sunshine of your life go tripping in
and out,

It is not she, I'm satisfied, who throws armchairs
about; .

I've seen your infantry—they fill one pram with hope
and trouble;

You don't put them in army boots and drill them at
the double?

Think, while you throw back-somersaults up there
(without a mat),

There's only lath and plaster, Jones, to sunder flat
from flat;

I want you to be neighbourly; I like to have the
feeling

You may drop in at any time—but why come through
the ceiling?

RAIN-IN-THE-FACE.

SUCH was the name his people gave,
So it is said, to a Redskin brave.

Rain-in-the-Face; not a Sioux or Cree
Was bolder in battle or hunt than he.

Fleeter of foot, more keen of eye,
Deeper in lore of the earth and sky.

Grey Wolf was hardy, and Running Bear,
But he was the friend of the restless air;

Brother beloved of the rising wind,
And the low, grey clouds that are massed behind;

Pick and pride of a wild, free race,
I like to fancy him—Rain-in-the-Face.

For all is fancy—except his name,
Too fine to forget in a world grown tame.

A name that you still may understand
In a hedged and coddled and lazy land,

If you scorn your ease with the right disdain
And learn the love of the country rain,

The rain that whispers, the blasts that beat,
The road that splashes beneath your feet;

The showers that sweep like a curtain grey
Along the valley from far away;

The song and rush of the day's wild space—
The sting of the sleet in your dripping face!

TO ANY FRUITERER.

O you, half-hid by your ambrosial goods,
Who, through a screen of clustered fruit and flowers,
Gaze out at us, as in primeval woods
Your tree-born ancestors would gaze at ours,
What can you care for gathering wretched pence,
How condescend to count, and weigh, and measure
Such wares as shame our wealth—untainted treasure
Surviving from the years of innocence?

Your business is an idyll; hour by hour
Handling soft-blooméd, sunny-coloured fruit,
And many a glowing, precious-perfumed flower,
Or at the worst some ripe, earth-savouring root.
The air you breathe is scented subtly-sweet
To lull a lotus-eater, still unsated;
With living, fragrant flames illuminated
Your shop seems some Titania's retreat.

O Fruiterer and Florist, strangely blest!
Passing, I love to mark, when time allows,
How blooms that wreathe your window seem to rest
In lavish garlands on your musing brows;
So must you see our faces, one and all,
With any glance you spare from your vocation,
Each framed and fair with floral decoration—
The world you see is decked for festival!

And when between festoons and musky crates,
Drawn by the lure of such rare merchandise,
We enter, and our wonder hesitates,
Amongst your arbour's scented treasures,
No sordid doubts and questionings are those,
Not the dull chaffering of need and duty—
We seek your shrine to sacrifice to beauty—
To give our riches for a short-lived rose!



THE HAUNTED LODGINGS.

DAY and night my digs are haunted by a flat and
lifeless face

Staring stiffly straight before it from its fate-
appointed place.

Crows the cock and rings the milkman, both in vain—
it never flies,

As I gulp my trembling porridge I can feel its fish-
like eyes;

In the evening, late returning, horrid fears my heart
assault,

Lest that Tenant should be jealous of my latch-key,
to *our* Vault.

Years, and years, and years, unwinking, frigid, it
has frowned the same,

Paralyzing predecessors, pallid, patient, till I came:
Years, and years, and years, unaltered, it will glare
when I am gone,

Turned by that grim, guilt-framed Gorgon into cold
and clammy stone.

Why its 'lines may never soften, why its hues no
years make faint;

Whose the fiendish art that doomed it, fettered fast,
to penal paint;

How it looked when it was Someone—what it did
before it died—

Ere it came to be a portent, petrifying, petrified—

Why it needs must choose my chamber—my meek
solitude appal—

Why I cannot climb the side-board, turn its face to-
wards the wall—

These are questions She must answer—She whose
kindness seals my doom,

Leaving up her Auntie's picture—as a favour—in my
room!



TO ORLANDO, A GOLDFISH.

ORLANDO, for a month or rather more,
We two have shared the shelter of one ceiling,
And still a certain coldness I deplore—
As if you somehow lacked real depth of feeling;
Are you so proud, because, of all the fishes,
You're made an ornament, the rest being dishes?

Yet, splendid as you shine in golden mail,
Like some fantastic knight too fine for fighting,
Those humbler brethren of the silver scale,
The homely herring and the wholesome whiting,
While you inspire a moment's idle ditty,
Go with me every morning to the city.

Transformed, unknowing, and perchance forgot,
They help to keep the wheels of commerce spinning,
Is yours, Orlando, much the nobler lot—
Day after day to hover, idly finning
(Mere curiosity of hue and motion)
The waters of your glass-bound, tea-cup ocean?

.

A prison crystal-clasped, gold armour's sheen?
Why these are tokens of a fairy story!
So *that's* what your reserve and silence mean—
A handsome prince, once heir to love and glory,
By some foul wizard spell-bound and supplanted,
Beneath the curse, "BE DUMB, OR BE DECANTED!"

TO YOU, IN YELLOW SHOES.

THE yellow crocus flames and fades
While yet the year is cold,
And brightly shines in March's glades
The aconite of gold;
Amidst green April's lights and shades
Dance daffodils untold.
Ere winter white is fled,
Spring comes with golden tread.

Like stars about each marshy place
When May's first pride is donned,
Glow marigolds with burnished face,
While, but a step beyond,
The yellow iris lends her grace
To fringe the rippled pond;
May hastens June to meet
With golden-shining feet.

The primrose, whom the poets bless,
Puts on pale yellow soon,
The dandelion's gold excess
Outshines the sun at noon;
Such is flower-fashion for the dress
To welcome gallant June—
And you, I notice, choose
To wear your yellow shoes.

MOONLIGHT.

HERE in the town, to keep the night at bay,
Lights without number gleam and shine and glow;
Unwinking stars, blue-white, in marshalled row;
Stars ruby, topaz, green, that swoop and sway
As through the crowds the cars illumined go;
Swift motor lamps that blinding radiance throw—
Till the loud streets are filled with feverish day.

And there above the flare and throb and haste
The full moon floats, alone and cold and clear:
And all the city's huddled roofs are graced
By her effulgence, pallid and austere.

The same dead orb, the same chill rays that shone
Upon the housetops of great Babylon.



IN THE SPRING.

(ANY HUSBAND TO ANY WIFE.)

My dear and only love, when, years ago,
(Who cares how many, while you fleet them so?)
I begged you share my income and my name,
And come to grace our suburb, and you came;

When first I led you to our new-made nest,
"Chatsworth" (Remember?)—jerry-built but blest,
How could I dream that this might come about—
My angel's conduct almost drive me out?

Man rule creation? Why, his brief domain
He leaves behind him by the evening train:
Though Cæsar wipe his boots upon the mat,
He's "someone to hang pictures" after that.

Once, my beloved—was it yesterday?
I knew a shelf where my tobacco lay,
Beside my chosen pipes—a chair before,
And certain volumes round it, on the floor.

That was the nook for peace; but ah, to-night,
Peace flaps her dusty wings in panic flight,
Scared by the call of duty!—Love, I hear—
I'll hang the pictures while you dust 'em, dear!

THE HEDGE.

BETWIXT the lane and the meadow green,
High as your head, is the hedge I mean,
Of thickest hawthorn; while here and there
Grey-lichened fencing its gaps repair,
And half-way down is a crazy gate,
Where moss and moulder obliterate
Carved initials and graven hearts:
And all along, from the harvest carts,
The spreading brambles that line the way
Snatch for their toll a wisp of hay,
A tuft of wool from the straying sheep—
A treasure for nesting-time—to keep:
All winter the wind will whistle through
And the old hedge shiver, as if for rue
Of its countless nests, that it cherished so,
Deserted, ruined, and cold with snow.
But now in the sun and the warm spring rain
Its coverts are hidden and green again:
The stout, old hedge is a Terrace long,
Whose only rent is the tenants' song;
With a cool, green roof, from the showers to shield,
And a southern prospect of sunny field;
A grievance too, such as tenants love,
For they doubtless threaten, next spring, to move,
Being waked at time from their evening naps
By rabbits that race through the hedge's gaps.
But they wouldn't leave it; I'm sure this year
Last season's chickens will settle there;
It's rather the thing to have your nest
One up, in Hawthorn Terrace (West).

A BIT OF A DOG.

THE smaller the dog is, the surer to wear
A pushing, important, impertinent air.

I judge from Adolphus—the least of my friends
No sooner begun than he suddenly ends.

There's never a minnow more arrowy-spry,
No needle so sharp as his little black eye.

His wiry legs flicker too quickly to see,
And often he chooses to hirple on three.

He runs like a leaf blown along in a draught,
Half side-ways, for want of more balancing aft.

His tiny brown body goes lightly on springs,
But his thoughts are concerned with the weightiest
things.

He has to enquire, as he scouts down the street,
The business of every odd dog he may meet.

He's always on business, quick, perky, and trim,
Not walking with you—you accompany him.

At evening his gravity seems to convey
His sense of an active, responsible day.

Oh, long may you dodge death's preposterous dart,
You little brown dog with the high little heart!

TO HEBE.

ON high Olympus, where, as poets feign,
The old gods dwelt and feasted at their ease,
A damsel waited at their revelries,
To fill the flagons ever quaffed again;
They call her Hebe, so I offer you
The honours, with the name, of Hebe, too.

Not that you wait on jovial gods, forsooth,
We are but mortals, with no time to spare,
Who choose our viands from a bill of fare
That shows no nectar of eternal youth;
Yet, for the smile you wear while working hard,
Accept the tribute of one hungry bard.

Each day we come to our accustomed place
To hold our festival of half an hour,
Cheered by the table's seasonable flower,
And by the sight of your familiar face.
Why, if supplanters occupy our seat,
The usual lunch seems strange and incomplete.

Did that fair Hebe of the gods possess
Your gifts of memory, obliging haste,
Your skill to handle temper, humour taste?—
She served Immortals, but her merit's less
Than yours, who wake a modest minstrel's strings—
Who, serving Mortals, make the best of things.

MY WAISTCOAT.

LIKE as the robin in the winter's gloom,
Cheering chill thickets with his glowing breast,
So 'midst a sombre wardrobe is my vest
Wrought with a sunset tangled in the loom.
As to the rose her blush, the plum his bloom,
So are its glories to my grateful chest;
Yet even more my downward eye's impressed
By pride of profile that its folds assume.

Romance and reason both extol the arc;
Orbed is the moon, a ball the active earth;
Only a full-curved sail propels the barque;
Where, without bending, is the long-bow's worth?

Why should not I, these colours all unfurled,
Globose and gay, go bouncing through the world?



THE LAST MILESTONE.

THE seaworn sailor seeks with hungry eyes
The first faint gleam of harbour lights aglow;
The panting runner loves the jangled bell
That, spurring, cheers him—just one lap to go.

Benighted poets love the watch-dog's bark
(Provided he is chained, if not their own),
But I, a wanderer too, would wreath with praise
A certain wayside, weather-beaten stone.

It stands aslant, forgot, beneath an elm
That keeps it shadowed when the sun is high:
And seems to count, along the luring road,
The hurried generations passing by.

Some sleeping poet of the Open Road
Such monument as this would well beseem;
It guards the memory of live-long days
That passed too soon, but left behind a dream.

How often, fagged and footsore yet content,
In rain or shine, by light of star or sun,
I've learned—in truth by heart!—its grateful words
Now half-obliterated—"AUBURN—One."

THE TRACE-BOY.

IN rags you face your fortune and the weather,
Windy or wet or fair,
You and your elephantine charge together—
A most incongruous pair.

You look as if you found it rather jolly,
Or scorned what cares you had;
His hairy lip is drooped in melancholy—
Patient he stands, but sad.

Yet, with some lorry-load the hilltop gaining,
That crowns the steep street's length,
With mighty heart and corded sinews straining,
Ungrudged he gives his strength.

Large as he is, by you he seems still larger;
The group you make suggests
A tiny squire who holds his master's charger
Outside the "ringing lists."

Envy, with me, and admiration mingle
When, perched upon his croup,
You ride with pounding hoofs and chains a-jingle,
Thrice happy—cock-a-hoop!



THE WINDS IN TOWN.

As I went walking officewards, a wind I chanced to
meet,
That snatched my hat and spun it round and chased it
down the street,
Yet brought me word of plunging deck, white sail, and
straining sheet.

Once more I steered the *Lorelei*, so handy and so
wise—
Until another sportive gust threw grit into my eyes—
And hummed a stave of rugged rocks that meet un-
tainted skies.

My feet forgot the pavement, for they trod the hills
again;
But round the corner came a breeze (with handbills
in its train)
That sang a song of cantering, and Morag's glossy
mane.

I rode like Turpin on my way—it was a glorious
run—
Until I met one zephyr more just come to town for
fun,
To sing of greens and little flags a-flutter in the sun.

From north and south and east and west, in twenty
different ways
They sang their tantalising song, the song of holidays,
All whistling for that other wind I find so hard to
raise!

AN OLD MAP.

FRAYED and ragged and tattered and old,
Coming to pieces at every fold,
To the careless eye, just a faded rag—
Like the shreds of some ancient battle-flag!
Are the roads the same on a newer map
As these that wander from scrap to scrap?
Would a new map lure me the same as this,
With its counties torn by a vast abyss?
Are the hills as friendly, with skies so near
As those that are dotted in pencil here?
Here are inns where the pencil has worn clean
through—

On a new strange map are they strange and new?
I've pored on this in the soaking rain—
There's a day's adventure in every stain:
I've burned square miles with a midnight match;
Its rents can tell how the hill-winds snatch.
Old guide, none other shall play your part;
I know your country by head and heart;
Your tatters may yet see service, if
I sit by the fireside, old, stupid, and stiff,
When nothing but tatters and dreams remain
I'll foolishly follow my marches again!



THE BOWLER—BEFORE HOLIDAYS.

ONCE, some lived happy in their towzled hair,
Some went in gleaming iron helmeted,
Some wore wide brims with sweeping plumes instead,
Those stern and grim, these gay and debonair;
Some leathern caps, some crested bonnets bare;
With modelled mud the savage caked his head—
Till, like a fungus, this black horror spread—
The nations mourn beneath the thing we wear!

Detested Dome, that chills my shadowed brain:
Dull Carapace, beneath whose gloom I crawl:
Cramped, black, lugubrious basin!—*Thou* contain
This skull that holds my (much or little) all?

Keep for a fortnight that remotest peg!
Who'd take a bowler hat to Kilmabeg?



JULY IN TOWN.

THE city bakes beneath the cloudless sun,
The streets are white and gritty in the glare,
The water carts are futile to refresh,
And every office window gapes for air.
‘I wish I were a salmon or a crab
Amongst young icebergs on a marble slab!

But, like a stoic, though my flesh may melt,
I will not care! In thought I’m free to fly,
And I am playing truant from the town
In fields of green beneath a fresher sky:
About a certain clear, deep river-pool,
Our favourite place for bathing, after school.

A warm, white shingle underneath the trees
Shelves down from shallows where the minnows
flash,
To a green fathom on the further side,
Green and pellucid, where, with one more splash,
I join my comrades diving from the brink,
Cool, young amphibians in fearless pink.

The cold, slow stream refreshes through and through,
And then I scramble out, and take a run
Along the bank, disturbing placid cows
That seek the willows’ shelter from the sun:
I feel those thistle-prickles in my feet
Now, walking to an office down the street.

TO HAROLD—A PIG.

No friend has introduced us, I confess,
The name I give you is the merest guess,
Yet, ere I leave you for my fellow-men,
You'll let me call you Harold now and then?
I did not choose the name with conscious care—
Something within said, "That is Harold there."
And if I called you Archibald or James,
You'd seem a stranger. So with other names.
Harold, the sky is blue, the air is warm,
Silence and peace invest the dozing farm;
The hens squat basking in the scattered straw
(The fattest hens a townsman ever saw);
The three plump cats, in ambush near the rick,
Will fall asleep unless their dinner's quick;
The turkey spreads his fan with none to mark.
And careless of an audience sings the lark,
While we hold converse, Harold, you and I,
Across the rampart of your sunny sty.
You wear a look that says you would confide
In one whose stick thus rubs your bristly side;
That you accept my comradeship appears
From that expressive twitch that stirs your ears.
Harold, suppose the gift of language lent,
Would you advise, "Get fat and be content?"
Would you surrender silence just to say,
"Eaten yourself to-morrow—eat to-day"?
Nay, surely something braver, "Pig I am,
Therefore behoves me to be high-class ham:"

Or "Though my rôle is not that I'd have taken,
I'll cheerfully develop breakfast bacon."

.

Harold, I honour you, and turn away,
Hoping to meet again some hungry day!



A ROSE IN A RESTAURANT.

HERE amidst cloying odours, noise, and heat,
Where crowds in hungry haste collect to eat,
You lift your dainty petals, fresh and sweet.

One touch of beauty, as an emblem old,
Lest we forget, in trifles manifold,
How heroes, ere they ate, the gods extolled;

How brave Achilles, great to fight or dine,
With ceremony took his pork and wine,
Making the meal and *melée* both divine.

Sigh for no garden kingdom, then, nor fate
Sadly reproach in dreams disconsolate,
O Queen! And if in exile, still in state.

We have no words, and yet perchance we feel
Not quite as rebels yet, your high appeal,
And spare one thought above our hasty meal!



THE TROUBADOUR'S GHOST.

ONCE in the golden hey-day of romance

There lived and loved a careless troubadour,
Singing he passed through good and evil chance,
Now sad, now happy he—but always poor.

But always poor, and always with a song

To give, he'd say—a better gift than gold
To light the heart that found a day too long;
And so he died—but how could he grow old?

Could he grow old, whose lute and heart were strung

To set to music Life with changing air?
Till lovers heard their fancies in his song;
Who learned his lilts from feet unweighed by care.

Unweighed by care, his minstrel spirit yet

Comes as of old where throngs the thickest crowd;
I hear him every Friday, fine or wet,
Beneath my window here, still brave and loud.

Still brave and loud; but who can recognise

That disembodied voice? They only see
A clumsy barrow—and, with careless eyes,
The handle turned that sets his singing free!

THE MORNING RASHER.

SWEET is the scent of bacon, gently borne
On kitchen zephyrs to the waking nose;
Crisped like the lettuce, tinted like the rose,
The frizzled slice that soothes the hungry morn.
Yet spare one thought for that sad sty forlorn,
Where he, to whom the hour its fragrance owes,
Guilelessly fattened for his mortal foes.
Shame, to love Bacon, yet the Pig to scorn!

A mother-ear once triumphed in his squeal;
Simple his life, pink infancy to prime;
Grateful his grunt that greeted every meal
That must increase his weight, decrease his time.

Oh, read his epitaph: 'he'll rest content—
“*This little pig*”—’twas he—“*to market went.*”



A SERENADE.

*(The white moon paused in the solemn sky
As the cavalier sang to a lattice high.)*

“Lady, who hold my heart, now, in your gracious
hand,
A casket locked with the subtlest art,
Open, and understand.

“Open and understand; what are its gems but this?
A thought of you, and, as contraband,
A daring dream of a kiss!”

*(The low wind woke in the softest sigh,
And a curtain moved at the lattice high.)*

“The humble dream of a kiss, adored! which I do
not crave—
Your mem’ry’s mine indeed, but this
I leave for some luckier knave.

“I leave for a duller knave, with a prosier tale to
tell
Of purses plump, than a moonlight stave,
By an idle rogue in a doublet brave,
With nought but a sword and a song to sell,
And only one word that is wise—Farewell!”

*(The minstrel ceased, with an upturned eye,
And the casement slammed in the lattice high.)*

EARLY NAVIGATORS.

WE may not sail, like Christopher Columbus,
For half-guessed lands across a chartless sea;
Yet in our time we ventured on deep waters,
Filled with the self-same restlessness as he—
From friendly shores in eagerness forth putting,
Only content with heaving planks for footing.

We did not launch in some high-castled galleon
Or bluff-bowed carvel with a sounding name;
And from our poop no silken standard rippled,
No gilded scroll-work caught the sunset's flame:
No cheering thousands thronged the fading shore
As we set sail, who might return no more.

We built the craft we sailed, with art ingenious
Learned of no shipwright, but of inborn sense,
Of one old door, preserved from making firewood,
And certain stakes that might have been a fence—
A branch or two, the top of an old table,
All lashed with string—more curious than stable.

She had no free-board; even on those reaches,
Serene and shining, she was hard to trim;
The sun was warm, and we wise navigators
Wore the costume least damaged by a swim;
Drifting in dreams of coral reefs and billows
With the slow stream beneath the leaning wil-
lows.

TO A MODERN YOUNG LADY.

PHILLIDA, can I forget
That first morning when we met?
You'd been weeping, but you smiled
(Rain and radiance reconciled).
I suppose you laughed to see
One more silly on his knee;
That was ever, cynics say,
 Woman's way.

Gentle did you look, as fair,
Yet you grabbed me by the hair;
What was I to understand
When you tried to eat my hand?
(You were welcome, could it please!)
Demonstrations such as these
Other women's wish denote
 For a vote.

What's the witching age of you?
Boasts your father, "rising two";
Well then, for a little while,
Fight your battles with that smile;
Here's one voter at your feet;
(Kick my nose, by all means, sweet!)
So you'll conquer; for a start,
 Here's my heart!

TO PHILLIDA, WHOSE AGE I GUESSED
AMISS.

THOUGH I deserve your frown, yet ah, forbear,
Lest every lover learn to call me foe,
Finding the anger that becomes you so,
Worn by the brow of beauty everywhere.
When I, a rash diviner, would declare
Which happy spring your eyes dawned here below,
How many Aprils do their sister know—
Where should I seek examples to compare?

The garden's graces wait for rain and sun;
Aurora's splendour glory by glory grows,
And how long since this sonnet was begun!
I judged you by a song, the dawn, a rose,
And guessed you twice too old, because to you
One proud half-year has brought the gifts of two.



WINDOWS AT SUNSET.

CHIMNEYED roofs in rigid line,
 Bushes two;
Rows of washing, when it's fine,
 And, it's true,
Overhead, when noons will shine,
 There's the blue;
 That's my view!

Nearly all, but see, not quite,
 For, by chance,
Flames and flashes, blinding bright,
Every window opposite
 In the glance
Of the sunset's levelled light—
 That's the lance
 Of Romance!

Till that fiery splendour dies
 Quite away,
Banners toss where linen dries,
Towers for tenements arise,
 Minstrels gay
Celebrate their ladies' eyes—
 Whence my lay,
 Eyes of grey!

THE HUT.

It was a day like this that set us building—

A day like this that lifts the city's heart,
It makes the little wood, that wore its greenest,
A paradise—Arcadia set apart.

No highway ran within a good half-mile,
So we were happy on a desert isle.

So thick the leaves, the sun, for all his shining,
Made only golden splashes here and there,
And lit long lanes—perhaps the paths of pirates—
Where round-eyed rabbits stood erect to stare;
Yet all the shadows were illumined too,
Like deep, clear water when the sun shines
through.

So we brave castaways, with all precaution,
Prowled through the glow and shadow of the wood,
Keeping skinned eyes for panthers or for pythons,
As folks exploring desert islands should;
Our small hearts beating at a dry twig's crack,
Lest some fierce keeper stalked upon our track.

And then we came upon a fallen fir-trunk,
The finest roof-tree for the house we planned,
Dead, scattered branches, wreckage of the winter,
For walls and thatch lay ready to our hand.
The carpet for our floor was soft, rich brown,
As year by year the pine-trees laid it down.

We proudly lunched within the needless shelter
Ourselves had built—our precious kingdom gained—
Discussing such additions for the morrow!
But when the morrow came, of course, it rained.
Yet, having known such habitation, how
Can you and I like city lodgings now?



A MONGREL.

Jock, if I ask you your pedigree,
What are the points you can offer me?
In vain I have searched through the doggiest books
To find a model with just your looks:
There were dogs short and lofty, and dogs low and
long,
But none that were worthy to put you among;
There were dogs built for running, and dogs built to
bark,
But none just so suited as you for a lark;
Some had coats fine and silky, and some coarse and
rough,
But never a coat, Jock, quite dandy enough;
There were tails fringed and waving, and tails
straight and short,
But none like the stump that you wriggle, old sport!
They tell me your figure is lacking in style;
It may be, you tinker, but what of your smile?
You match nobody's furs, sir, you're not in the
vogue—
And I'm hanged if you're sorry, you cynical rogue!
You've a dash of true Irish, eh?—fond of a fight?
But babies may bully you, morning till night.
You're the best of all pals for a tramp through the
mire;
The closest old confidant, here by the fire.
Of dogs of all classes, degree low or high,
You've the quickest and cutest and kindest eye;

I can't find your fellow—it's folly to seek;
You're a dog by yourself, Jock, a dog, sir, unique;
And I think that the soul of some humorous sage,
In making his journey through age after age,
Must have chosen your body, old rascal, to teach
That the power of true eloquence isn't in speech!



OLD GLOVES.

WHAT prettier theme could ever minstrel find
Than this, "Old Gloves"—a password of Romance?
Long, soft, and silken, worn at some brief dance,
Whose gentle touch left fetters fast behind:
Or such as knights in tourney loved to bind
Upon their helmets, when, with reckless lance,
They headlong charged to win one lady's glance?—
But other gloves than these I have in mind.

They never clasped a white and tender hand,
But hands I used to find were far too deft;
Good friendly fists—but how they used to land
That unexpected "right" and "wicked left!"
Let poets celebrate what gloves they please—
Few leave more tender memories than these!



THE SPONGE.

I THINK I'll call you Fido: should a sponge,
Once a sea-wonder, now domestic, tame,
That shares the shivers of my morning plunge,
Pass through its useful life without a name?
And what a change—from your Pacific Ocean
To this strait tank of soapy, cold commotion!

I wonder, Fido, if you ever wish
For those old days beneath the sunny tide,
Where, through the glimmering fathoms, fabled fish
Came slowly cruising, horned and lantern-eyed:
Where fleshy sea-flowers closed their cups in
dread,
Until leviathan's vast shadow fled.

No doubt you knew the kraken, sometimes saw
The old sea-serpent with his weed-grown scales;
Watched nameless growths, with tentacle and claw,
Snatch for the flickering of silver tails;
Perhaps you served as cushion—these are
guesses—
For young mermaidens combing yellow tresses.

It seems so tragic, Fido, to be torn
From that dim ledge beneath the tropic sea,
To serve so humbly every mortal morn,
Thus soused and squeezed and buffeted by me:
Yet honour, Fido, lies in duty's path,
You're dubbed, at least, Companion of the Bath!

A PORTRAIT BY RAE BURN.

HIGHBORN lady of days departed,
Yet so lively and lovely still,
Hurrying time, too, was tender-hearted,
And saved your charm by a wizard's skill.

When you laughed—when the words were spoken,
That seem to hover upon your lip
(Silent so fair; was that silence broken
By gracious greeting or saucy quip?)

When the silks, that you wear so lightly,
Stirred and rustled in stately dance,
When your eyes could flutter that shine so brightly
Was life indeed like a brave romance?

Suppose you woke from the spell's long rapture,
Stepped at ease from the guarding frame,
Have we belles to rival, or beaux to capture?
You'd find us timid and pale and tame?

Heigho! My lady of days that are over,
The gay and gallant, the young and fair,
Fair as your ladyship—loved and lover
Grow old and vanish as you hang there!

REFRESHMENTS.

THERE'S a little white house on a road I know,
With the brae above and the burn below;
Too humble indeed for a dainty guest,
But oh, what a place for a vagabond's rest!
For mile after mile your way you wend,
Ever enticed by the promising bend
Of the climbing road or the brae ahead.
That's never a summit—a step instead;
There's scarcely a dwelling, near or far,
Till you turn one corner, and here you are,
Where a green strath carries the prospect down
To a distance blurred by the breath of town:
Where the rough road dips for the long descent,
And the tramp may rest with a heart content.
For here is the cottage, white and clean,
Sheltered by firs, straight, sombre, and green;
Its chimney smokes with a lazy blue
From the hearth where the kettle sings for you.
The hens and the baby come to stare
As you feed in the sun and the open air
On scones and butter and bramble jam
And tea in gallons—(the gourmet I am!)
The guidwife waits to enjoy a crack
With a red-haired two-year-old hid at her back;
And the burn runs chattering, murmuring by,
And the larks sing, lost in the fathomless sky!

JOSEPHINE AT INTERLAKEN.

If you're bound for Interlaken,
Set amidst the mountains white,
With your luggage would you pack
(You will find it very light!),
Ere you start,
My old heart?
No, I do not want it back!

When you light at Interlaken,
There are two sights to be seen:
There's the Jungfrau, cold and clear,
Then, oh then, there's Josephine!
If you're blind,
You will find
My heart leaping when she's near.

Skywards over Interlaken,
Where my heart with you will go,
Soars the Jungfrau; Josephine,
As adoréd reigns below;
Fair and proud,
Snowy browed,
Maid and mountain, each a Queen!

Ere the dawn at Interlaken,
Every peak is flushed with pink;

Each white summit glows at e'en;
None can see it but must think
 " So a rose
 Comes and goes
On the cheek of Josephine!"

Lakes that laugh by Interlaken
Learn of her blue eyes to shine;
If they should but glance at you,
You will leave your heart with mine.
 Will she care
 For the pair?
She's so many—what are two?



TO GEORGE, IN HIS FIRST TROUSERS.

YOUR new promotion, at one costly stride
From kilted youthfulness to trousered pride,
These tailored tubes that dignify your gait,
Some lighter muse than mine must celebrate.
I can but sigh for all that it imports—
This transfer into trousers out of shorts.
Breeks do become you—shall it be denied
That all the neighbourhood is edified?
That all the terrace thrills with grateful shocks
To mark your passing in those sunset socks?
You think this dignity will compensate
For all that you've outgrown? Poor fellow, wait!
That crease, your glory, keen-edged as a knife,
Will cast a wobbly shadow o'er your life;
Those well-pressed legs, blade-straight from hip to
heel,
Will shame your pride with set pretence to kneel.
Weary o' nights, you'll sacrifice your rest
To place them 'neath your mattress to be pressed;
Only to find at morn that what you've done—
Is make two creases where should be but one!
And learn, alas, how hard it is to dare
A tailored world with trousers folded square!
When round your wretched knees they sag and wilt,
How oft you'll mourn for that discarded kilt!
How oft despair, poor, flattered, fated wretch,
O'er futile engines sold to make them stretch!
I'll say no more. Be cocky while you can—
Condemned to trousers!—Pleased to be a man!

MY SHIP.

THEY built her in the Happy Isles: the chiefest
wizards there
Divined by star and sacrifice whose fate she was to
bear;
They found a prophecy to fit from keel to soaring
truck,
And ballasted with ponies' shoes, to bring the
speediest luck.

She took her precious freight on board at El Dorado
quay
(I've heard the Bill of Lading sung in my old
nursery);
She'd rocking-horses on her decks, but all the roomy
hold
They packed with gems and nuggets, fat dubloons
and bars of gold.

Then, while she spread her sunny sails and curtsied
o'er the bar,
The Skipper took his altitude from my most lucky
star;
And that's the latest certain news, whatever Hope
avers,
The sad horizon thrills, some time, to every sail but
hers.

But still, though pirates plunder, calms delay, and
 tempests vex,
Though every rocking-horse was swept, long since,
 from off her decks,
Though not a nugget now remains, not one dubloon
 to spin,
Still, still, by ancient prophecy my ship is coming
 in.

Who knows? That small Blind Stowaway may take
 command and steer
My Argosy to port at last, the blesséd buccaneer!
With all disaster in her log—lamed, looted, run
 aground,
Yet with the treasure of my dreams—one captive,
 safe and sound!



TO "MACDUFF"—A BLACK PERSIAN.

WE talked of pets one evening—Pekinese,
Poms, pugs, and poodles—creatures such as these;
Then someone said, "Behold our own Macduff,"
And in you stalked—no Highland terrier rough;
Silent and black, as if the outer night
Had sent his fit ambassador, bedight
With his own sombre livèry, to convey
The tidings of his triumph o'er the day.
Straightway your Royal Silence, entering there,
Leaped, like a flitting shadow, to a chair,
And couchant gazed, with golden, steady eyes.
Beyond our sight to nameless mysteries.
I smoothed your silken darkness, an adept
Skilled in the human homage you accept;
Some murmurous answer you were pleased to deign,
Then turned aloof to contemplate again.
Who dares to count you pet, like any pug
That snores distended on the fireside rug?
You to include with all that yelp and bark,
O heir and emblem of primordial dark!



TO MY KIPPER.

Is this the end, bright rover? I could weep!
How still he lies, who—was it yesterday?—
Athwart the shattered sunbeams' quivering play,
Like silver lightning flickered in the deep;
How lonely now, who, where the surges sweep
With countless comrades cruised in close array;
How dumb, who, could he only speak, might say
Where the sea-serpent spends his winter sleep!

Unscathed, though plunging porpoises pursued;
Unscathed, though harried by the headlong gull;
Fierce fish and fowl fate suffered him elude,
But ah!—that shadow of a wallowing hull!

Accept this tribute of sad verse, poor fish,
You are at least my favourite breakfast dish.



A NOSE I KNOW.

WE twain are strangers, though we daily meet
As I go east, you west, along the street;
I can but guess if all your name and nation
Delight, instruct, with such a decoration:
Enough for me to pass, each morn at nine,
One feature formed to freshen and refine.
Inventive nature, tired of tinting roses,
Turned, O my nameless friend, her art to noses:
She tried experiments with scores and scores,
But only pleased herself—and me—with yours.
While Winter's shrouded skies pour rain and hail,
It points you to your work, austere and pale;
But when comes Spring, all nature to renew,
Like opening buds, it takes a warmer hue.
I mark its modest tip in vain withdraw
Within the shadow of a broad-eaved straw;
The sun-beams kiss it in its coy retreat,
And lo! its blushes brighten up the street.
Perhaps I love the friendly feature most
When it proclaims you're staying at the coast;
Limp in the heat I languish, and forget
How skies are somewhere blue, seas flashing yet;
Then it appears, like some ripe, ruddy fruit—
Summer's advertisement, the sun's salute;
Bold, blistered, weather-beaten, crimson-brown,
Free Pan's defiance to the flabby town!
So I take heart, nor from December shrink,
Cheered, as the nights close earlier, to think
Its glow will linger long, though Winter come,
As in lown gardens the chrysanthemum!

A THICK MORNING.

A CHOKED, red moon low in a yellow sky—

Yellow and damp, the corpse of dawn's quick gold;
And gloom that mocks the hour; raw, clinging cold;
Untimely lights, half-smothered as they try
To pierce the city's sordid mystery,
That dims with night the morn scarce two hours
old.

And for the vista of the street, behold
A cavern's mouth, where all that meets the eye
Are phantoms hurrying past from gloom to gloom;
Faint, hazy fans of light where windows peer
Upon the fog, from buildings lost, that loom;
And spectral cars with headlights blurred and blear.

Yet, up above, the yellow thins away,
And for an hour at noon, lo, it is day.



AN OLD FIREPLACE.

PEACE to the bones of the men of yore
For this ingle of their making!
When wild night winds in the chimney roar,
And shriek and rattle at every door
Till the old house starts a-shaking,

May their brave ghosts come from the kirk-yard clay
To the roof that still remembers—
From fields forgotten of unknown fray—
From the sea that did their trust betray,
And gather about the embers.

May they stretch their boots to the crackling glow,
As they did in the days departed,
And swagger their stories to and fro,
And laugh and quarrel as long ago,
Still mortal and restless-hearted.

May they build again in their several ways
(To the grey-beards' grim derision)
The grandest schemes for the coming days,
And see their dreams in the fire's red blaze,
And hang their hopes on the vision!

.
The clocks strike twelve—but I need not fear,
There's nothing that can betide me;
I'll crave their courtesies—"Ghosts, good cheer!
One extra shadow won't crowd you here—
Come, brothers, and sit beside me!"

THE MILKBOY.

O EARLY urchin, who salutes the day
With cheerful clamour, spite of dark and cold,
I really hope—whatever I may say—
Your lungs may be as sound when you are old;
Your heart as light as when your cans you bear,
With tramp and whistle, up from stair to stair.

I don't suppose you lend your towzled head
To silly dreams about the cream you bring—
Of meadows green, where cows all white and red,
Wait 'neath the willows, with their tails a-swing,
For patched and powdered milk-maids clad in
silk,
Whose beaux bewigged escort them out to milk?

And yet you wake me, as you bear along
Your clattering cans that stir the drowsy street,
Quite like a pastoral poet, with a song,
To mark the measure of your lively feet.
You sing but as the linnet sings?—Not you!
It's nearly always meant for "Hitchy-Koo."

But you've a right to make your favourite noise,
You plucky, plodding, red-eared little elf,
A Ganynede among mere mortal boys,
More looked for even than the postman's self.
What anxious housewives for your footsteps wait!
How chaos threatens if the milk is late!

COLOURS IN NOVEMBER.

Now it's dark for half the day,
Now the world is wearing grey:
Grey the weeping sky looks down
On the grey and gloomy town.
Therefore must I sing a stave,
Praising colours bright and brave
Which the sullen month defy—
Mystic music for the eye!
Blessed be aught that lights the grey
With a flash of colour gay—
Green and yellow cars that pass;
Red tomatoes through the glass;
Purple stockings, carmine socks.
Rosy cheeks, and ruddy locks;
Gloves canary, scarves that flame,
Colours ne'er a man could name;
Blessed be every hat and tie
Flaming with some joyful dye:—
Princess, with the sapphire blue,
Here I proffer praise to you;
Princess, with magenta bright,
I would thank you if I might;
Princess, with the crimson crude,
Take, oh take, my gratitude—
Yet the merriest magic lies.
After all, in two grey eyes!

THE CAT.

THE problem that you offer who shall solve,
You sleek, soft, silent, most domestic sphinx?
Is it the true, the fundamental Cat
That by the peaceful ingle sits and blinks?

Is this your real self, retirement's friend,
Self-groomed and sober, sworn to warmth and
ease—

This lithe, contented fireside ornament
That camps, for company, upon my knees?

Does this decorum in my honoured den
Express the cat the kitten strove to be?
Or is it merely to recuperate
You deign to be respectable with me?

Are you more proud, when on the darkling tiles
You tear the night with lacerating voice,
And hear the furious casements all around
Discharge their volleys vain—is that your choice?

When you were young, did She—your mother—teach
Which of the basketful should most excel,
The cat who wore the happiest hearth-rug airs,
Or gave the latest, loudest, longest yell?

THE ROAD THROUGH THE VILLAGE.

THE road leads lone and white through fields of snow
That glimmer faintly to the moonless sky,
Or dives through black plantations fearfully,
Where silence lurks and listens like a foe.
Then a hill's crest it crosses—and below
The huddled houses of the village lie,
Seeming the cold and darkness to defy
With cheerful stir and sounds and windows' glow.

From doors that open on a laugh within,
The lamplight shines on snow in spaded mounds;
The smithy throbs with flame and ringing din;
The baker's van goes slowly on its rounds.
The trodden track delays from door to door,
But turns at last to dare the dark once more.



THE PIGS THAT WENT TO MARKET.

THEY were small and pink and tender to be taken
from the sty,

To be driven through the city in a crate;
And we thought with shame of sausages, who saw
them going by,
And blushing remembered what we ate.

There were more or less a dozen pigs, and all the lot
were twins,

Pathetically grunting each to each;
They were neat and clean and dainty, and their rosy-
tinted skins
Showed the texture and complexion of a peach.

They were driving through the sunshine, just as
babies take the air,

Yet we saw that there was something that they
missed—

Twelve little pigs in company, whose mother wasn't
there,

And each tail had lost the crispness of its twist.

No sombre mourning carriages paced on that cart
behind,

No hats were gravely lifted as it passed;
So here's my little elegy—for who would be unkind?
And may the price of bacon fall at last!

ARCHIBALD'S APPLE-GREEN SUIT.

THE trees are in leaf, and the flowers are in bloom,

The sky has discarded its grey,

To make a fit setting for Archibald, whom

I've seen in his summer array!

Archibald, Archibald, say,

Could any poet keep soberly mute,

Greeting a man in an apple-green suit?

Archibald, if you have panted for fame,

Now it is coming your way;

Folks will remark, without knowing your name—

Can't you conceive how they'll say:

"Guess the sensation to-day?

Questions of colour grow quickly acute—

We've seen a man in an apple-green suit!"

Seek the remotest resort you can find,

Sheathed in that splendid display,

Still you will leave an impression behind,

Rumour will tell of your stay—

Unnoticed? O, Archibald, nay!

Your passage will bear its remarkable fruit—

The myth of a man in an apple-green suit!

Renown is a wreath for the brows of the bold—

Why should you fling it away?

Archibald, take what I cannot withhold,

The tribute of this little lay—

A minstrel's admiring "Hooray!"—

Who finds in the spring nothing fitter his lute

Than you in full bloom, with your apple-green suit!

THE PHILOSOPHER.

THE sky is grey from east to sunless west,
And dreary falls the rain,
While to the eve's dejected mood attest
Her tears upon the pane.

The roofs across the way are dark and damp,
And sloppy is the street,
Wherein the passers-by, with coat and gamp,
Benumb disgusted feet.

The chimney-cowls swing moping to and fro
With melancholy cries,
Before wet gusts that still more dismal grow
As dripping daylight dies.

The very smoke, that shows how meals prepare,
Trails listless, though so light,
Where, clearly, households in depression share
A wretched appetite.

Yet hear our Street Piano singing come,
As in the sun it came,
Still keeping jolly while the world is glum—
Why can't I do the same?

THE SPORTS.

OLD man, do you remember, too, how certain years ago
(It doesn't do to count them up—I'd rather leave it
so),

When Rugby games were over and ere cricket had
begun,

There seemed no such inheritance as legs designed to
run?

No Board observed your weighty nod in those aspiring
days,

No deep, reflective furrows lined the brow that
yearned for bays,

And on that casket of your brain, that pink and
polished dome,

A towzled thicket, hating hats, defied the brush and
comb.

I smile or sigh when you're addressed as "Sir" by
serious men;

To me you're good old "Fatty" still; I see you once
again,

Your persevering person straitly laced inside a sack,
Acquiring scorned contusions while you hirple down
the track.

And then we rose in company to more heroic heights,
And shivered in our little shorts on chilly April
nights,

With gooseflesh on our little legs, and very short of
breath,
While partial parents prophesied that we should
“catch our death.”

We practised stern privations to improve our wind and
pace,
Declining mashed potatoes at the meal before the
race,
And cutting sweets and pastry down to just enough
—in vain!
O, Fatty, forty years ago we might have tried again!



A HERO.

I OVERHEARD the chatter of two youngsters on a car;
They were bound for school, and solemn, as such
 lucky beggars are:

And from their conversation—too serious for a smile—
I learned that Porky Paterson will win the Open
 Mile.

It doesn't seem to matter much, perhaps, to you or
 me,

But here's to Porky Paterson, whoever he may be!
He'll never earn a fairer fame, or wear a grander
 style

Than that of "Porky Paterson, who won the Open
 Mile."

His father's left him longer legs, or more expansive
 lungs

Than these his honest devotees who wag prophetic
 tongues:

Was ever hero worshipped so, with less reserve or
 guile,

Than splendid Porky Paterson, who'll win the Open
 Mile?

He may have shrewder schoolfellows, of quicker,
 brighter brain,

Just now they're shadowed nobodies—their hour may
 come again:

They may be Sirs and Somebodies some future day;
meanwhile

Would they were Porky Paterson, and entered for the
Mile!

O, hero, whom I do not know, whatever be your place,
Your form of hope or handicap in life's severer race,
May this resplendent memory despondent hours be-
guile—

"I'm still the Porky Paterson who won the Open
Mile."



THE SPRING FRET.

It may be false or true
That our ancestors of old,
When the world was nearly new,
And the moon was hardly cold,
Lived and chattered at their ease
In commodious family trees;

That in weather such as this,
Never dreaming of a roof,
They would perch in giddy bliss
From the dusty earth aloof,
On a branch's gentle swing,
Eating fruit like anything!

That they frolicked in the shade
Fifty feet above the ground,
While the leaves and zephyrs made
Lively motion all around,
And the arching branches spread
Airest shelter overhead.

That when evening, drawing nigh,
Hushed the forest green and dim,
And the sun sank down the sky,
They would climb to gaze at him,
Blessing his benignant glow,
Heedless of the night below.

Oh, I like to think it's true,
And I wish we were as wise
In such weather (so do you);
What are roofs to leaves and skies?
What the desk and office chair
To a tree-top in the air?



THE RIVALS.

TOWARDS blue roofs the April sun
Goes down a windy sky,
Bright, though the day is well-nigh done,
As in his zenith high,
Transforming all he looks upon
With his stupendous eye.

Past cloudy coasts whose windy bays
Are depths of glowing light,
He shoots his arrows, level rays,
To check invading night:
And dazzles windows in a blaze
That watch the glorious fight.

His far flung glance, that will adorn
The moon with silver state,
For which—the bearer of their morn—
Dependent planets wait,—
Surveys, in most majestic scorn,
The fire within my grate.

His tiny rival flickers pale
Beneath that splendid stare:
Must all his old allurements fail—
The book and easy-chair?
No entertainment more avail
To match the Open Air?

THE TOWN CAT.

WHILE some sit smugly in domestic ease,
Fondled and fed,
Caressed and flattered, lured to laps and knees,
Till wild hereditary memories
Are almost dead,

No soft, seductive comfort sleeks your skin,
No fireside mat
May lull the predatory soul within
Which claims the burning tiger as your kin,
O houseless cat!

You lead a life as savage as is theirs
Who have their haunt
In pathless jungles, choosing luckier lairs
Than you, who, slinking, crouch on draughty stairs,
An outcast gaunt.

You are a vagabond, a furtive thief,
No more, to most,
Than vagrant nightmare, maddening midnight grief,
A wandering voice, discordant past belief,
A mangy ghost.

Yet temper not your wailing for fine ears—
Be it increased!
Your only vengeance for the kicks and fears
That harry through its hungry, hunted years
The last wild beast!

THE HAUNTED BRIDGE.*

A LONG mile out of the little town
An old road turns from the highway, down
Through plough and pasture, crooked and steep;
A road tree-shadowed and worn so deep
Its mossy banks from the walker hide
The fields that dip to the riverside,
And where the river runs dark and slow
By rocks that lean o'er the depths below
There is the Bridge—like the life of man,
Now bright, now shadowed; a strait, short span:
Hidden by trees; and a quiet broods
Over the river, the bridge, the woods:
A silence deeper for birds that sing:
The ceaseless drip of a tiny spring,
The sound of the distant shallows' rush
Where the river for ever is whispering, "Hush!"
The echoed "plop" of a trout at play,
The brown owl's cry in the gloaming grey,
The cushat's croon, or a harsh, wild scream
As the shy, grey heron flaps down the stream.
And this is the spot which, once on a time,
A rascal chose for an ugly crime;
This is the oak, where, gun in hand,
Murder in heart, he took his stand;
And that is the road, where, homing late,
With never a fear of his lurking fate,

* Vicar's Bridge, on the Devon.

A baker drove with his jingling cart,
To meet the bullet that pierced his heart.
And folks will tell you, when nights are drear
And branches beckon, you yet may hear
The jingling creak of a cart, that still
Suddenly stops at the foot of the hill,
And gazing fearfully, yet may see
A shade that lurks by a groaning tree!



A WHITE MARCH MORNING.

MARCH is the month of brown and green, wet fallow
and new-turned plough,
Green that deepens with every day, spreading from
earth to bough:

Glistening brown in the coulter's track, wet with the
beating rain,
Where, after the weary winter, the wheat will rustle
again.

March is forgetting the winter—winter so loth to go,
Who turns on the wings of the cold north-east and
decorates spring with snow,

Over the fresh young colours, delicate green and
brown,
Flinging in half derision his wonderful ermine gown.

As if to recapture his kingdom, sure of his splendid
power,
He conquers the year's rebellion and reigns again—
for an hour:

Challenging April's beauty, golden and green bedight,
To equal the spotless glory he gives in a single night.

Can June, with its shade and sunshine, its hedges and
woods of green,
Rival the work of his tempest—acres of spotless sheen,

Mountains from base to summit white with the same
wild brush,
That jewels with scrupulous wonders the windward
edge of the rush?

March of the brown apparel, and mornings of rainy,
light,
Wore like a queen's tiara this morning of blue and
white.



A LODGER TO HIS LANDLADY.

MADAM, I pray you, of your kindly soul,
Bring for my fire a little lump of coal:

Set it on, so—

And, as you go,

Think, if the task your weary spirit irk,
The miracle such ministrations work.

Care not at all what price per hundredweight—

Think in what lightless depths it lay of late,

Blacker than night,

That now so bright

Scatters abroad its wealth of warmth and glow

That—for how long!—it hoarded there below.

In some primeval forest grew a tree

Destined—through you—to warm this room for me.

Ah, but it saw

Strange tusk and claw!

Its boughs were split by what portentous teeth!

What spiney horrors crawled and wound beneath!

A fiercer sun, perhaps, than this we know

Hatched blooms the earth is now too tired to grow,

Savage of hue;

The sky ran blue

Untempered yet by any breath of smoke,

Before hot stars outspread no kindly cloak.

Of all that palpitating heat and glare
Our destined tree absorbed its ardent share
That from the earth
Leaps now with mirth—
And, Madam, by the deed that you have done,
Behold me bask in the Primeval Sun!



MY NEIGHBOUR'S NOSE.

SNORE on, my happy neighbour, through the wall,
Fleeting dark hours with music's rise and fall!
A deep, domestic nocturne—who'd suppose
Such range and power possessed by fleshly nose?
What though I cannot sleep?—My vigil's paid
By this rare tribute of a serenade.
Long since the midnight chimes tolled solemnly.
Yet still go endless motors speeding by,
Each with its wail or whistle, grunt or snort,
Like prehistoric monsters, out for sport,
But, how so quaint and queer the passing horn,
Your own performance puts them all to scorn.
I love to see by daylight, and admire,
That mild proboscis, gifted like a choir:
To see it point you on your townward course,
Who would believe its loud, persistent force?
Are you yourself, I long to know, aware
How versatile a feature 'tis you bear?
When you lie wrapt, unconscious, neighbours hark
A potent trumpet challenging the dark:
They think of syrens down the misty Firth;
Of clarions blown for battle or for mirth;
The huntsman's horn, the bugle's stirring call—
But you, the real performer, miss it all?
I can but hope, my neighbour, for your sake,
That now and then you, listening, lie awake,
While from the nose I wear—(for me still mute)—
Through lath and plaster sound bassoon and flute!

THE ROOF COUNTRY.

My eyrie, from the world aloof,
Commands a wilderness of roof;
The prospect that my window fills
Is like a view of Highland hills,
A rocky, lonely, windy range,
Still changing, as the seasons change,
Its varying colours, sometimes blue,
Purple, and dark, rain-washed anew.
In summer often stoney-gray,
Parched by hot hours of cloudless day.
In winter, white with short-lived snow,
That feels the warmth of fires below,
And dulls and darkens, shrinks and drips,
In little avalanches slips.
At the calm close of sunny days,
The further roofs retire in haze;
The chimneys at that charmed hour
Turn turret, minaret, or tower.
Golden and glowing, dim and high,
While east their azure shadows lie.
Quaint cowls of every size and shape
Diversify the chimney-scape,
Like crouching cats, or hooded nuns,
Like toques, top-hats, and morions.
And some revolve when zephyrs blow,
Sedate and silent, pensive, slow;
But when a gallant gale sets in
With dizzy speed they whirr and spin—
The twinkling concourse makes for me
A kind of high society.

A STRICKEN HERO.

O, TOMMY, with regret I've come to hear
Of the ill-luck that checks your brave career,
The more, because, I know that you will find
Your body's treason prey upon your mind!—
Your body, active casket for a heart
That ever leapt to play the hero's part,
Surrendered to the Measles!—and you lie
Inert and petted; what indignity!
You were prepared, of course, to challenge all
That can the bold adventurer befall;
In dreams you stood and whirled a dripping sword,
Alone, but lopping limbs, against a horde
Of shiney spearmen (playing once again
The gory bits of *Alan Quartermain*).
Maroons' privations would just be to you
Another thrilling chapter to live through;
The outcome of your doom to walk the plank,
One more last-moment-rescuer to thank;
Mosquito and tarantula and snake,
Unpleasant, doubtless—but what yarns they make
For risk to life or limb what would you care,
High Admiral of some navy of the air;
When aero pirates swooped about the blue
The first to whiz to vengeance would be you!
And should you come to scathe 'midst war's alarms—
For wounded warriors, hospital has charms.

But THIS is different—Measles!—what can fame
Make of a foe with such a silly name?
How can this theme inspire historic easels,
“Sir Thomas (ætat twelve) attacked by Measles!”



AN AWFUL THOUGHT.

HENRY, I know the loving care
You daily lavish on your hair;
In vain the jealous eye would seek
Another head so smooth and sleek;
The high ideal I respect
That makes you toil to such effect.
Yet, while your thatch is thick and young,
Give heed to my prophetic tongue!

.

I see, O Henry, year by year,
That silky chestnut disappear:
Where labours now the careful comb
I see a pink and polished dome,
And on its apex, sprouting there,
One single, solitary hair!
One hair—for that luxuriant scalp,
Like some lone flagpole on an Alp!

I see your present care and pride,
For that survivor, multiplied;
The toil that served for all the rest
Expended on the last and best.
I see you count it every night,
And check it by the morning light;
And take it, lest its sheen be dimmed,
To be shampooed and singed and trimmed.

And, for the decades it has braved,
Massaged and perfumed, pruned and waved.
And then I hear, like beauty's knell,
Some brutal barber, keen to sell,
With these dread words his plea begin,
"Your hair is growing rather thin"—

.

I draw a veil. Make, wretched man,
Your middle parting while you can!



THE ORGAN-GRINDER'S BABY.

WHILE common infants take the air
In dull and silent state,
Music and motion everywhere
For you collaborate.

There may be many a baby-cart
More fitted for repose,
But would you lose this life of art
To ride in one of those?

What mere perambulator sings
Full-throated through the town?
Or, halting 'neath a window, brings
The ha'pence jingling down?

Your carriage carols as you lie,
And half a suburb hears—
Shan't you remember till you die
What soothed your infant ears?

Those thundering melodies that send
Vibrations to your toes—
A mighty maestro shall you end,
To tell of how you rose!

Or, little Bundle-with-a-face,
Poor pianist unknown,
Just wheel about from place to place
Some bundle of your own?

RHUBARB-TIME.

THESE are the days of Rhubarb; families everywhere
Try to dispense with dinner, knowing the only fare—
Rhubarb in pie or pudding, pasty or fool or tart,
Cruel in combination, or savagely shrewd apart.

These are the days of Rhubarb, kith of the Upas tree,
Fatal to ancient friendship and conjugal harmony;
Never a husband ventures, "Dear, what is this to-
day?"—

They scowl at their bosom's treasure—as poisoned
spouses may.

These are the days of Rhubarb. Go for a rural walk—
The treacherous acrid acres are rank with the ghastly
stalk;

Dine at your club, for comfort—there, in your last
retreat,

Lurks, like a masked assassin, Rhubarb—guised as a
Sweet!

These are the days of Rhubarb; nights when we lay
us down,

Haunted by "Rhubarb Specials" that speed to the
shrinking town;

Morns when the wan fruitarian, desperate, breaks his
pledge,

Or fasts on a meal remembered, and dies with his
teeth on edge!

THE HAT IN FRONT.

DEAR madam, if the hat you wear
Was consciously designed
To take attention anywhere.
Most noticed of its kind,

Your artful milliner and you
May triumph in delight
To learn that it engrossed my view
For hours, the other night.

The orchestra my ears I lent,
And so divided sat,
For still my eyes, entangled, went
No further than your heart.

I listened, though I could not see:
As though I shyly hid
Behind some ribbon-fronded tree,
Or plumey pyramid.

And if my shadowed head I stooped
To peer its eaves below,
The stately structure straightway drooped
And bowed itself also.

And did I duck to left or right,
Or crane to look above,
It made, with nodding breadth and height,
A corresponding move.

So when of sport my comrades speak,
I'll tell them, by-and-bye,
Of how we played at hide-and-seeK—
An orchestra and I.



MID-DAY COFFEE.

THE Bedouin, toiling over sun-scorched wastes,
Searches the distance for the first brave trees
That mark the green oasis' fringe, and hastes
To reach the cooling well, and take his ease.

The raft-borne castaway, who many a moon
With anguish drifted under brazen skies,
Beholds with rapture, girt in its lagoon,
The palm trees of a little islet rise.

So we who work all day upon a stool,
Snatching a hurried breakfast ere we leave
The kindly roof whereunto, as a rule,
We can't return until the dewy eve,

With just such deep emotion do behold
The fingers of the clock that mark the hour
When, coated and be-hatted, we make bold
To seek the solace of some smoky bower,

Where for a space, relaxing, we may sprawl,
And dally with a coffee, white or black,
For boss and business caring not at all—
Till the stern moment strikes for going back!

TOPGALLANT HOUSE.

TOPGALLANT HOUSE looks west-nor'-west,
Lonely and bold and high,
On a hill that sweeps to a windy crest,
Raised in the troubled sky;
The driven clouds go by
With level volleys of rain and hail
For the grim old house in the teeth of the gale.

Topgallant House is full of sound,
Like a ship in a rising sea—
A tall, stout ship for the sunset bound
Whatever the tempest be.
Buffeted wrathfully,
From cellar to attic—what whistles and roars,
With rattling windows and thundering doors!

Topgallant House is gaunt and grey
Under the whirling sky;
But the sun looks forth at the close of day,
Gazing with friendly eye.
The squalls hush down and die,
And the rain-washed windows dazzle and glow
Far over the valley in shade below.

THE BO'SUN'S MATE.

WHEN in the firelit nursery old fairy-tales were told,
 Their most delightful fantasies would leave me calm
 and cold;

Politeness made me hear them out; for years I had
 to wait—

Till I could read large print myself—to meet a
 Bo'sun's Mate.

Most simple stories talked of King, of Prince, and
 fair Princess,

They were all make-believe to me, plumb, shiney
 foolishness;

I knew I'd found a solid chum at last, when kindly
 fate

Permitted me to read a "blood" that had a Bo'sun's
 Mate.

The Captain was too dignified, the mere A.B.'s too
 tough,

Between them came this character, just jolly dog
 enough.

There were no pictures in the book, but ever since
 that date

I've worn his portrait on my heart—the perfect
 Bo'sun's Mate.

His tubby figure made Romance, and with him ever
went

A growl of technicalities—who bothered what they
meant?

With topsails in the offing—there was something to
await

When, hitching up his pantaloons, appeared the
Bo'sun's Mate!

I've read a many books since then, and some of them
were fair,

Forever hoping, half-ashamed, to meet my hero there,
And o'er the gravest treatises my heart still leaps
elate

At any reference that bears upon a Bo'sun's Mate.

And now I've met him in the flesh—as broad as he
was high—

As if he'd known me all my days he winked, a-rolling
by

Upon an Allan liner's deck—so here I celebrate
A childish dream comes really true—my boyhood's
Bo'sun's Mate!



MOONSHINE FOR MIRANDA.

LAST night, Miranda, when the city lay
Hushing to rest beneath the summer stars,
Fairer than earthly cities are by day,
And dignified by silence day debars.

Last night when wheels and hoofs and hurrying feet
Were few and fewer, till the world was still,
I crossed the end of the deserted street
That passes by your dwelling, up the hill.

And saw the moon, that, rising, seemed to float
Between the hill-top houses, dark and high
Against her luminous haze; scarce more remote
Than the dim line that bounded street and sky.

Full-orbed and argent, most serenely bright.
Though the wide heavens waited to adore,
She still delayed her conquest of the night
To set her peerless lamp above you door!



THE GREEN BATH-ROOM.

O, PRECIOUS painter's journeyman,
Who, 'neath Aurora's blush,
Your new-creative work began
With transcendental brush,
I woke to hear a heavy tread, perceive an oily scent,
And blessed you for your industry—and this is what
it meant!

What merman-prentice mixed your hues
To match a sun-pierced wave—
The emerald gloaming that endues
A tropic ocean-cave?
What did you whistle as you worked, what incantation
strange,
To bring upon familiar walls this mystical sea-
change?

The morning sun that glares so hot
Upon the world outside,
Untempered ne'er invades this grot
By you so glorified:
Their gold transfused with tender green, the sunbeams
softly come
To shine upon me while I sport in my aquarium!

When in the town our persons bake
Beneath the noontide glare,
My memory's pinions will I take,
And find refreshment where
At last I seem to realise the universal wish,
And splash in this occult lagoon, a cool and blessed
fish.

A sand-gold bath-mat for to tread,
A dolphin-dado round,
A cod-carved cornice overhead—
Such fancies may be found,
But let amphibians who would be domestic yet marine
Shun all such follies, and instead have bath-rooms
“done” in green!



THE TOLL-HOUSE.

AT these cross-roads a toll-bar stopped the way.
Where still the little toll-house stands to-day;
A white-washed cottage, just one storey high,
Between two elms that shade it pleasantly.
No strip of garden graces it before—
The dusty high-road's at the very door,
But flowering clematis adorns the wall
Through which two windows peep, deep-set and small,
And at the back a green enclosure shields
A plot, for use and beauty, from the fields.
'Twas here the traveller of another day
Would reign his horse and halt, his dues to pay;
The sound of wheels and voices cheered the spot.
But now the cottage knows a lowlier lot.
One muslin-curtained window, two feet square,
Allures with bottles twain of gingerbeer;
Three jars of ancient sweets, disposed to melt;
A box where "biscuits" may be faintly spelt,
Yellow and faded with the ruthless glare
Of years of afternoons upon it there.
All else may alter, but this merchandise
Custom and customers alike defies,
For when some urchin buys a poke of sweets,
'Tis not these prized exhibits that he eats,
Preserved as emblems of the sticky store
Somewhere concealed within;—and something more
For wonted wayfarers too old to buy,
Landmarks which cheer the reminiscent eye.

THE CLOUD.

A MOUNTAIN soars against the southern sky,
Dwarfing earth's hills about its mighty base
To humble ridges, dim and commonplace,
It shines above their green so radiantly;
Summit o'er floating summit towering high,
Vast rounded shoulders reared with buoyant grace,
Full in the glory of the noon's blue space,
Too white and radiant for the dazzled eye.
Where floats its lucent crags and airy crests
In purer rays than ever reach the earth,
Or where, within its chasms shadow rests,
What creatures flit, of winged aerial birth?
Steadfast it stands, a splendour in the sun,
Yet ere the evening darkens, it is gone.



FLOR DEL MAR.*

SHE lies at anchor in a sheltered bay,
Whose islets hide her from the clustering town,
The heathery rocks, a cable's-length away,
To meet the quiet sea slope gently down;
There are few sounds, save when the grey gull
screams
Or distant tackle whines, here where she dreams.

The tide runs gently rippling through the links,
Rusty and weed-grown, of the cable chain,
That through green shadowy fathoms dimly sinks.
Never to hoist her anchor up again,
While she may hear, instead of storms that roar,
The bees' deep, ceaseless humming from the shore.

Bluff-bowed, black-painted, picked with green and
white,
A stout ship once to weather any gale.
She may have been some skipper's brave delight,
When life was hers, careening under sail,
Thrilling to wide-spread pinions—that is past;
She bears alone two naked stumps of mast.

* The *Flor del Mar* used to lie in a quiet corner of
Tarbert Bay, Loch Fyne.

The green weed gathers round her water-line,
Wreathing and waving to the ebb and flow;
Upon her taffrail, parched with sun and brine,
Birds from the shore alight, and sing, and go;
And still the hold's dark silence seems to be
Filled with deep murmurs from the outer sea.

She is a foreigner—her lines would show—
A crippled exile from some port afar.
Her name three words of music—one may spell
In white across her counter *Flor del Mar*;
And so she idly swings with tide and tide,
Still haunted by that echo of her pride.



THE NOSE OF SUMMER.

THERE are some noses tinted from within,
Like Bardolph's hot proboscis in the play,
That shine a warning through the ruby skin—
But such are not the burden of my lay.

I sing the ruddy nose that from the sea,
Or surf-white beach, at length steers back to town,
A cheerful headlight, tinted healthily,
Like ripened fruit, a warm and roseate brown;

The nose incarnadined by rural sun,
And bronzed by buffets of the rustic air—
Which, when its days in Arcady are done,
Still wears the uniform it boasted there.

Such noses are like flowers from a friend,
Cut in his garden, specially for you;
Or seem like summer fireworks, which intend
To celebrate your leave, now nearly due.

O, noses peeled and freckled, bronzed and red,
Illuminate the city's dusty ways,
Until shall come, when weary weeks are sped,
At length, at length, our turn for holidays!

THE COW IN THE RUSHES.

THE meadow slopes towards the stream,
That in the closing night
Still through its alders shows a gleam
Of clear and silver light:
An owl already cries
The day's sad obsequies.

From sandy burrows here and there
The rabbits' timid crew
Foresee the welcome dusk, and dare
Come out and drink the dew,
To vanish underground
At any sudden sound.

And where the sloping meadow shows
A hollow in its sweep,
A moist and verdant jungle grows
Of flags and rushes deep,
Wherein the wisest cow
Reclines serenely now.

She is half-hidden as she lies,
Rich red and white and clean,
Unvexed by noon and noon-day flies,
Embosomed deep in green,
Where ragged-robin round
And buttercups abound.

Her pink and curly tongue appears
To lick her balmy lips,
Her useful tail is still: her ears
Scarce move their silken tips:
Could any artistry invent
Such perfect, placid, cool content.



THE BURGH CART.

YEAR in, year out, it goes its useful rounds,
On duty in the Burgh's narrow bounds,
Alike on summer mornings, bright and sweet,
And when the day's delayed by rain and sleet.
The honoured postman sometimes passes by—
This visits every house impartially,
Yet village poets constantly ignore
Those faithful wheels that toil from door to door,
That shining, patient horse that drags its weight,
With serious civic purpose in his gait.
In truth, what beauty can respect impart
To that plain vehicle, the Burgh cart?
Useful and solid, in its humble way
It only does its duty every day.
Yet once a year this tumbril coarse and scorned
Becomes a chariot festively adorned;
On one bright day the housewife does not hear
The rumble of its drawing near,
But many a child, her tinny round her neck,
Pleads for a place upon its garnished deck,
And for a laughing load sleek "Robin" waits,
His tail beribboned, and his mane in plaits,
While with sedate complacency he wears
A rose between his sympathetic ears.
With twenty private carts in like array
Thus goes the Burgh cart on holiday,
Promoted from its duty's humdrum rule
To be the idol of the Sunday School!

AN INVITATION TO AUDREY.

Now, Audrey, while these skies are clear,
And while our city belles appear
 In gay and airy gown,
Oh, bid farewell to country flowers,
And come to rival these of ours
 And blossom here in town.

The little birds that shrilly sing
Wherever you go wandering,
 Must spare you for a while,
And you shall hear, for morning larks,
Brave martial music in the parks,
 The gloaming to beguile.

The silver streams that ripple through
Those fields, for other flowers and you,
 Will run though you be gone;
And here, if not so bright as those.
A wider, statelier water flows,
 That you shall shine upon.

And for the berries ripening there.
Beneath untutored suns that dare
 Paint freckles on your cheek,
You shall, enthroned in pleasant ease,
Have fruit and cream as you may please,
 And coloured ices eke.

It seems the city's self must guess
That you will telephone a "Yes."

It decks itself for you—
For all the streets are fair with flags,
Whereunder greedy rumour brags
The King is coming too!



THE RUSTIC LOVER.

SWEETHEART, the corncrake that you love to hear,
That voice of silence at the close of day,
Calling aloud from some green meadow near,
And pausing for his answer far away,

That modest-coated bird, who lives unseen,
Haunting the peaceful fields all wet with dew,
Whose voice is unmelodious and mean,
And yet expresses summer's soul to you,

That happy bird that pleases so your ear,
Has but one note to win his mate's reply,
Like constant truth, for all his wooing, dear,
And will you scorn if that alone have I?



THE SPELL.

(“ ELDERLY MATRONS, LADIES, MISSES.”—SEE
COSTUMIER’S ADVERTISEMENT.)

“ ELDERLY Matrons, Ladies, Misses ”—
Was it a poet who penned it so?
Or did a subject such as this is
Frame his phrases to lilt and flow?
 Unnamed brother
 To that other,
Sang of the “ Ladies of Long Ago ”?

Elderly Misses, Ladies, Matrons—
Still it goes like a ballad strain;
Keep they a bard for their gentle patrons,
Selling suede to a soft refrain,
 Giving pleasure
 While they measure
Silk for the summer and wraps for rain?

Misses, Matrons, Elderly Ladies,
Turn it again, but it sings the same,
Nay, but a verse so cunningly made is
Fit affair for the voice of fame,
 So to sing them
 Ought to bring them—
Hoyden, dowager, damsel, dame.

Elderly Matrons, Ladies, Misses,
All allured by a lilting line,
Coming in crowds where the height of bliss is
Fashions precious and prices fine;
As they plunder
Will they wonder?
Summer sales in the Muses' shrine!



A PICTURE BY GEORGE HOUSTON.

It hangs, a happy lure, within
A certain city coffee-room,
As fresh as morning, through the haze
Of eddying tobacco-fume,
And whoso drinks his coffee there,
Breathes, by its grace, the open air.

A fallow field, a rutty track,
That shines with wet, and leads the eye
To snow-crowned hills that rise against
A rain-washed February sky—
A sky from whose untainted space
You feel the breeze upon your face.

It seems a window, here in town,
That looks upon no noisy street,
But shows the country in the spring,
A mood of nature, bright and sweet,
Which through all seasons will retain
The cool, clear shining after rain;

The vision of a homely scene
In crystal light and shadow blue,
Revealing to our gladdened eyes
The world we pass so blindly through,
Thanks to the wizard who could find
This Magic Casement for his kind!

THE TINKERS' BIVOUAC.

HID in the hollow, where a deep-worn lane
That twists downhill, turns sharp to climb again,
Far from the high road's dusty, beaten track,
The wandering tinkers make their bivouac;
As if the genius of the gipsy race
Still led such nomads to their camping place,
In such a nook the true appropriate spell
Would bring to life Lavengro's Isopel.
It is a little clearing, green, yet dry,
Sheltered by tangled bushes; and near by
A spring, collected in a shallow pool,
Provides a reservoir of water cool.
Across the lane that lures to this retreat
The wayward shoots of bramble stretch and meet,
And in the spring the hedges all along
Are full of nesting twitter, stir, and song—
So well this coign of sunny solitude
Receives the wanderers' encampment rude.
This is his home, for here his fire he lights,
And rigs a shelter 'gainst the dewy nights;
Here smokes his pipe, here cooks his savoury pot,
And here, mayhap, enjoys his houseless lot.
His towzled wife the ragged washing dries
Where hum the bees and flit the butterflies;
His bare-limbed offspring play about the lane—
Wild faces dark as Egypt's nomad strain.
One morn upon his aimless way he goes,
And here returns the spirit of repose;

Yet should you rashly linger, as you pass,
About these embers on the trodden grass,
A waking inward voice will whisper, "You,
Somewhere, somehow, were once a wanderer, too."



EVENING CRUISES.

Now, while the sun stays late aloft, while eyes are
bright and blue,
No doubt you will a-sailing go, equipped with tickets
two,
With fit provision for the case—some casket charged
with sweets,
And murmur more or less like this, the while your
shipmate eats:

“There is a legend of the deep that once I read
appalled,
The story of a phantom ship, *The Flying Dutchman*
called,
Upon an endless, aimless cruise she must the oceans
plough—
My pity for her passengers is turned to envy now!

“Queen Cleopatra sailed with pomp down Egypt’s
flattered stream,
Whose gliding mirror glowed and flamed, reflecting
gleam for gleam,
And poets tax their art to paint the glory that was
Nile’s—
So how can I in worthy words congratulate the Kyles?

“In byegone days Phœnician fleets, swift quin-
queremes of Tyre,
Put forth upon uncharted seas, and, after labours
dire,
Came rolling home with precious gems for treasury
or mart,
But I more wisely take aboard my Jewel when I start.

“The Happy Islands are no myth, or not at least to
me,
For yonder Little Cumbrae looms upon the purple
sea;
While hither shines from wave to wave athwart the
charméd night,
Then turns away surpassed, outshone, the glance of
Pladda Light!”



THE SHEPHERD'S COTTAGE.

Lost in the sea of hills it stands alone,
With sturdy walls of rough, grey, weathered stone,
And slated roof, that on a showery day
Shines like a pool of water far away,
One chimney low, whence rises azure smoke,
To tell the watching hills of homely folk—
A far-seen signal, 'neath this empty sky,
That draws the wanderer's step and cheers his eye.
North, south, east, west is nothing to be seen,
But soaring heights and glens of sunny green,
Hills beyond hills, that giant shoulders raise,
Until they melt and mingle with the haze:
The windows of the house are small, as though
It feared to see the hills about it so.
The spot is bathed in silence, and the air
Dreams hot and heavy in the hollow there;
But yet, approaching, pause, and hear around
This silence thrilling with melodious sound.
A little burn goes lightly tinkling near—
Too hushed a voice for careless ears to hear:
And faintly from the distance floats a cry,
The whaup's long whistle, wild and plaintively,
The warm, thick grass, with tiny creatures rife,
Stirs to the ceaseless murmur of their life. . . .
Before the door the shepherd's collie basks,
Tired by the morning's early, anxious tasks:

He hears your footstep grate upon a rock,
And lifts his watchful head with ears a-cock,
Then springs to meet you, growling gruffly near,
And barks to tell his household you are here.



TO A CERTAIN GUINEA-FOWL.

WHERE the farm-house, clean and whitewashed, looks
 through poplars down the hill,
 Once we liked to stroll at evening, for the air, as
 people will—

Meditating,
 Or debating,

In the dusk serene and still.

All the cocks and hens were quiet, save for some
 contented cluck,
 E'en the turkey ceased to bubble; scarcely quacked
 the clamorous duck;

All was restful,
 Like a nestful,

Till you brought your wretched luck.

More disturbing than the watch-dog's long, lugubri-
 ous, moonlight howl,
 Or the darksome, drear complaining of the dissipated
 owl.

This dejection,
 In connection

With a plump, domestic fowl!

Far away across the meadows, echo hears, dis-
 console,
 Creakings like an old wheel-barrow moving at a
 mourner's gait,

Lorn and lonely—
 Could we only
 Comfort you, or lubricate!

Does some legend tell the grievance that inspires your
 querulous cry?
 Dark and tragic, like the nightingale's, or are you
 possibly

(Transmigrated)
 That ill-fated
 Mrs. Gummidge, by the bye?



AUBADE, TO AUDREY.

Now all the world is waking,
Awaken, Audrey, too,
The city's self is making
A morning song for you—
You may not hark the gentle lark, the cuckoo's double
note,
Yet whistles here shall greet your ear, of bass or
treble throat.

Here are no roses nodding
Against your window-glass,
But iron hoofs are plodding,
And lumbering lorries pass.
Down in the street no linnet sweet your praise with
song began,
But for your joy the dairy boy loud clatters can on
can.

No Chanticleer is crowing
To speed retreating night,
But clancorous cars are going
Each way for your delight.
No swallow leaves the ivied eaves, dawn's embassies
to bring,
But you will hear (I promise, dear) the postman's
furious ring.

One, swarth as nothing mortal.
Comes hoarsely calling coals:
An urchin at your portal
Delivers morning rolls:
Above your head a heavy tread is threatening the
floor—
Now wherefore make, when you're awake, pretence
of sleeping more?





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